Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

Official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, featuring articles and reminiscences of the people and places in the Ypsilanti area

The LIONS

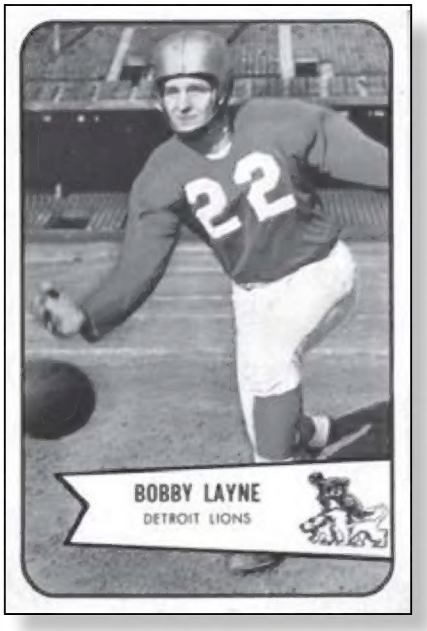
It wasn't the "Curse of Bobby Layne" — I Put the "Hex on the Lions" for Leaving Ypsilanti

BY C. TINO LAMBROS

It was a good run for our beloved Detroit Lions. The Lions 2024 season caught the imagination and support of the sports world - especially those of us in Southeast Michigan. We all were on the bandwagon filled well over capacity. As it is said, "Wait till next year" as Super Bowl LIX fades away and we are in midst of our 2025 run for the Super Bowl. Lots of changes completed in roster and staff but we are looking forward and not stewing over what did and didn't happen in 2024. Certainly, key injuries and five turnovers contributed. Still, with five minutes remaining and 31 points on the board, there was still hope.

We die-hard fans are now focused on the 2025 season and the 2026 Super Bowl.

So, Lions fans, what does any of this have to do with Ypsilanti? We "Ypsilantians" of a certain diminishing age group have a different perspective. We vividly recall the Lions of the 50's — especially that last, or should I say, previous championship team of 1957 and the alleged "Curse of Bobby Layne."



Bobby Layne trading card. *wikipedia.com*

Arguably the most famous movie star/entertainer currently in Washtenaw County, Chelsea's Jeff Daniels, appeared on the Jimmy Fallon Show before the ill-fated Detroit Lions playoff loss. Mr. Daniels wrote and sang his song, "The Curse of Bobby Layne." There is a long held belief that after Hall of Fame quarterback Bobby Layne led the Lions to their last championship in 1957, he was traded to the Pittsburgh Steelers and on his way out the door is said to have shown his displeasure by cursing the franchise letting everyone know, "The Lions will not win another championship for 50 years!"

Now, 2025 extends that alleged curse to 68 years. I don't believe Bobbie Layne contributed to this cold spell. The Lions, Red Wings and Tigers all won championships in 1935. From 1936 to

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FALL 2025

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YHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Ypsilanti Historical Museum is a museum of local history which is presented as an 1860 home. The Museum and Rudisill, Fletcher-White Archives are organized and operated by the Ypsilanti Historical Society. We are all volunteers and our membership is open to everyone, including non-city residents.

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From the PRESIDENT'S DESK

BY BILL NICKELS

Since 2006, we have been privileged to have had a partnership with Eastern Michigan University that provided graduate student interns to staff our museum and archives. We are appreciative of a recently signed three-year extension of that agreement. Catherine Sanford joined us as our new Archives Intern in mid-August. She is a first-year student and is eligible to serve in that position for two years.

Catherine Sanford, new museum archives intern.

During my Summer of 2025 President's Report, I wrote about the small towns in Michigan that have the best historic districts. You may remember that I mentioned an article that placed us in a group of towns that included Marshall, Saugatuck, Holland, and Frankenmuth.

Jan Anchuetz, YHS contributor to the Gleanings each month, called my attention to a Facebook post that identified "Nine of the Most Eccentric Towns in Michigan." They include Grand Marais, Owosso, Charlevoix, Cross Village, Frankenmuth, Saugatuck, Leland, Ishpeming, and YPSILANTI.

The article said, "Ypsi's funky downtown is home to many galleries, including those found on the campus of Eastern Michigan University. However, the town is known for a somewhat embarrassing landmark. Once deemed the world's most phallic building by *Cabinet Magazine*, the Ypsilanti Water Tower is a brick wonder. The Queen Anne architecture reflects the style of the late 1880s and features four crosses carved into the building by superstitious construction workers. Next to the tower, snap a picture with bust of the town's namesake, Greek war hero Demetrios Ypsilantis, and climb the tower steps to take in the views. Ypsilanti's Black History is celebrated through open air murals, landmarks, and sculptures, including Elijah McCoy's "The Real McCoy," the Black Heritage Signage Project, and art dedicated to the women from Ypsi's history." We live in our city daily and don't stop and think about the many ways the town we live in is special.

The Ypsilanti water tower along with Demetrius Ypsilanti statue located across from EMU's campus.

Virginia Davis-Brown was a longtime Ypsilanti Historical Society volunteer in the museum and archives. She served as chair of the Museum Advisory Board and as a Board of Trustees member for many years. When she passed, she bequeathed a portion of her estate to the Ypsilanti Historical Society to be used as the YHS Board of Trustees desires. It totaled to be $47,696! This money joins other money that will be used to complete our building's major improvements.

The Ypsilanti we know with a focus

Water Street Wayside Sign

on history and historic preservation did not automatically happen. It was driven by many community members. We recently lost another one of those leaders – Lynda Hummel. She served two terms as a council member, was the Executive Director of the Washtenaw Economic Club, and co-chaired the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival for many years. Because of her photography, she was referred to as the "Picture Lady." Her photographs that displayed the best of Ypsilanti will be her lasting contribution to Ypsilanti.

Lynda Hummel

To receive State of Michigan money to demolish Ypsilanti's Water Street area, the State of Michigan Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) expected Ypsilanti to publicly tell the automotive history of the area. To tell this history, three MotorCities National Heritage Area Wayside signs were proposed and accepted by SHPO. The signs were produced & installed. After some time, the signs were mistakenly removed. Carrie Malas, the City of Ypsilanti Preservation Planner, learned of their removal and found two of the three signs stored away in the Department of Public Services Building. She is having the one lost sign reproduced to join the two surviving. All will be re-installed in the Water Street area soon. The rich automotive history of the Water Street area will again be visible to our community.

My neighbor at the southwest corner of West Cross and North Wallace found it was time in her life to sell her Classical Revival home. It is one of the most visually obvious homes in the Normal Park Neighborhood. A young couple new to Ypsilanti are the new proud owners. They decided to buy in Ypsilanti because of Ypsilanti's interesting history and Ypsilanti's Historic Preservation ethic. Nathalie Edmunds and Jane Bird Schmiedeke must be smiling in heaven right now. They are the two community members who led the creation of our Historic District and hoped this would happen!

After our success having our March Quarterly Meeting available remotely, our attempt during our May Quarterly Meeting was another disappointment. Don't entirely give up on us, the May disappointment corrected a mistake! When you receive an announcement of a Quarterly Meeting that will be available using Zoom, try us again.

Have a nice fall season.

Travel through History ... or make a little history of your own!

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1949 not much happened with the Lions. With a 4-8 record in 1948 and a 2-10 record in 1949, completing their 13th and 14th consecutive years missing the playoffs.

So, what changed and what does it have to do with Ypsilanti and this quarterly historical Ypsilanti Gleanings newsletter? Some of this is verified in Ypsilanti and Lions history and some of it is my own take on growing up and experiencing these things with my friends from the 1950's and adding my own interpretations or exaggerations, if you will.

Recently, while strolling around the showroom at Gene Butman's Ford dealership on Washtenaw, I was drawn to the dealership history and my own life growing up a few blocks from there. The banner stated, "Butman Ford established in 1957." Interesting, the same year the Lions won the championship. Another picture showed the Pearl Street location and the previous dealership, E.G. Weidman. The Lambros family must have bought one of the last Fords from Weidman or one of the first Ford's from Butman's - still buying into their generation.

Entryway to Walter O. Briggs Field on the campus of Michigan State Normal School. *(courtesy of E.M.U. archives)*

By the large display window was a Lions display with current smiling quarterback Jared Goff. The Lions have had a long relationship with the Ford Family. It was an ad to "Win a trip for a day at the Lions training camp and watch a practice in Allen Park!" Fill out an entry card and hope for yours to be selected.

Well, folks, time changes everything. Going back to those championship years in Ypsilanti, we boys from back then have a different story to tell about the Lions training camp in the shadow of the world famous Ypsilanti Water Tower and the E.M.U. campus. Our age group is slipping away but the memories are still strong.

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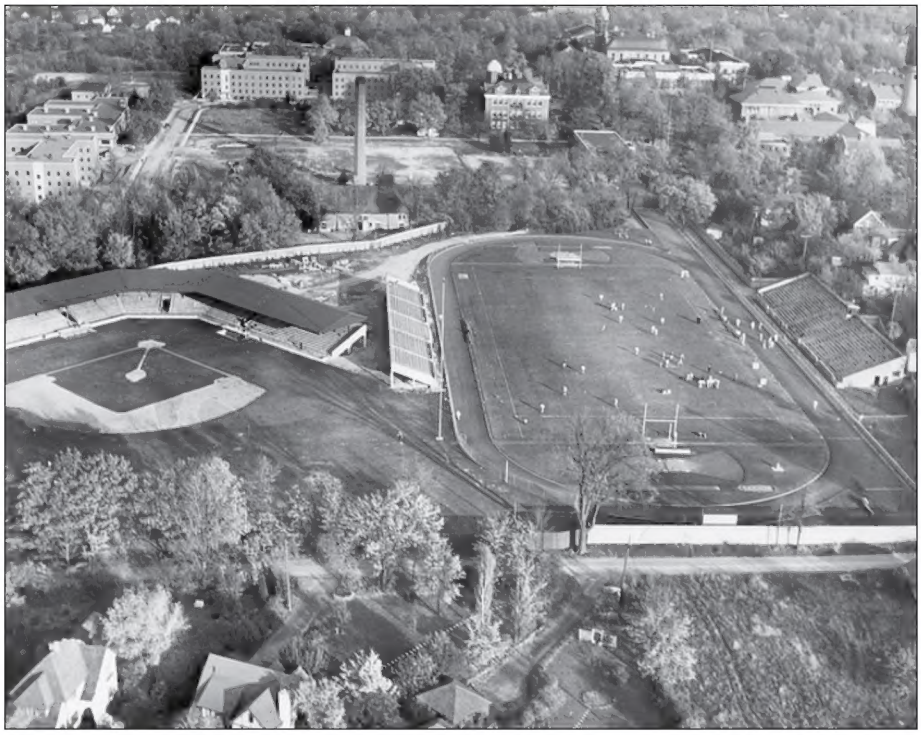
My friends and I in our pre-teens and early teens know the real story. We were there and had great experiences moving those Lions up the ladder to the 1957 championship. We young aspiring Ypsilanti athletes were staunch and loyal supporters of our beloved Detroit Lions. We knew them! We walked with them. We talked with them. We encouraged them to their greatness.

In 1938 the Lions moved their games to Detroit's Briggs Stadium, joining the home of the Tigers at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. The Lions moved their pre-season training camps to several locations including Charlevoix, Cranbrook, Grosse Ile, Windsor, Alma and to Ypsilanti and Michigan State Normal College- Now E.M.U. That's when the Lions took off and my friends and I pushed them to their success. Or perhaps it was Walter O. Briggs, owner of the Tigers and the stadium named after him. Surely he had something to do with the switch. He was born in Ypsilanti in 1877 and built a very successful business in the automobile industry.

With a few changes in 1949, the Lions improvement accelerated. Edwin J. Anderson became the Lions President and Nick Kerbawy became General Manager. Roster improvements were made. Doak Walker, 1948 Heisman Trophy recipient was acquired. Many believed Doak Walker was too small to be a star NFL halfback. Soon after Buddy Parker became head coach, Doak Walker led the team to NFL Championships in 1952 and 53, then retired from pro football after the 1955 season on his way to becoming an NFL Hall of Fame inductee. WE WERE THERE - my friends and I!!

The Lambros' home was on West Cross for 60 years, just west of the water tower. This was at the edge of the campus where West Cross and Washtenaw Avenue crossed each other. Forest Avenue came through behind McKenny Hall and fed into Washtenaw across from Allison's Shell Gas Station, now Domino's Pizza. A gas station was on every corner.

Many of us young athletes were 1954 charter members of the Ypsilanti Little League. At age 13, most moved up to



Aerial view of Briggs Field which included a baseball field and grandstands was constructed in 1938. *(courtesy of E.M.U. archives)*

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Detroit Lions practicing at Briggs Field. Both the baseball and football facilities were demolished in 1972.

the Babe Ruth League. Our gathering spot was Recreation Park. We had supervised activities. We played pick-up baseball on one of the three diamonds - most likely the Little League field, now the Rutherford Pool. We played any kind of pick-up game, touch football, tennis, basketball, badminton, or just hung out. There were many supervised activities available for all ages including early elementary to high school. Our hired park supervisors worked with all ages, often successful high school athletes from Ypsilanti area schools, always a male and female. It wasn't unusual for kids to arrive early and spend most of the day in the city's parks. They opened about 9:00 and closed at 5:00. Few parents were around. Often, I stayed long enough to leave the park, run home, get my Prospect Tiger Little League uniform on and get back for pregame warm-up for a 6:00 game.

When we had enough park activity, we jumped on our bikes and headed to Edd Dykman's Handy Store on Sheridan Street, the neighborhood grocery store and gathering place. They had a big porch, and we could all hang out drinking Royal Crown Cola, Faygo, Nehi Grape Soda and the still popular Coke and Pepsi. We snacked on chips, candy and more. When we were done, we would go our own way. Someone may suggest watching the Lions practice, a very popular idea. Untangling our bikes, we scrambled off the porch.

Ypsilanti had a wonderful system of alleys. Across the street from The Handy Store was one such alley that led right to West Cross Street. One could also go south and get back to Recreation Park through alleys. Safely on the north side of Washtenaw were family homes. To the west was Oakwood Street. This part of Oakwood was an unpaved alley all the way to Huron River Drive. To the east was the entrance to the E.M.U. athletic fields. Behind all these homes was a wooden fence eight to ten feet high that separated the homes from the football field.

The entrance of Brigg's Field was an impressive gateway/ticket booth combination, especially to young and energetic pre-teen youth looking to their athletic futures. Along the top of the entrance gate was Walter O. Briggs Field carved into the concrete archway. Inside this welcoming entrance, to the left was the football field. Straight ahead was the baseball field. I believe this area is now the Jefferson Science complex and the large campus parking lot. To the right were the locker rooms, training rooms and athletic offices, now Briggs Hall. Straight north was an open field, 100 yards or more it seemed, until you reached the college dormitories.

Yes... these championship professional athletes stayed on campus, in the dorms, and walked from the locker room to the dorm. They even ate in the dorms. Things were much different then. Many of these players spent two to four prime years of their careers in the military service. Many came out of World War II and were called back for the Korean War or were simply drafted, fulfilling their obligation to the U.S.A. while shortening their athletic careers. A brief video of players from the post-war era discussed their salaries as being in the $5,000 to $6,000 range. I recall a Lion selected for the NFL All Star Game who had to refuse because the boss of his off-season job as a car salesman needed him.

There were no fancy, expensive cars filling team parking lots. No luxury accommodations.

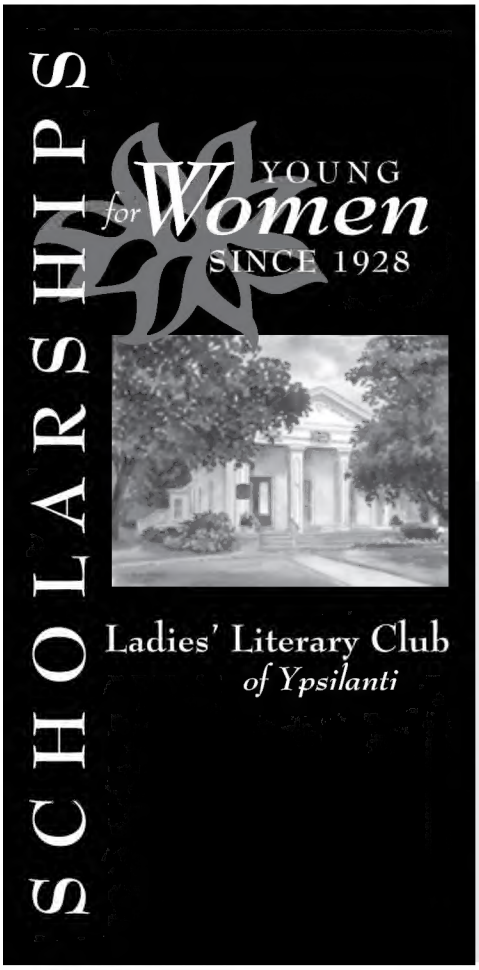
There were none of these things that we staunch, youthful Lions supporters witnessed.

There was nothing secretive about attending practices. They were wide open, no special ID, no security and no strict restrictions. We "young groupies" hung out just out-

side the locker room door, which was usually open. We were quite animated trying to recognize players. We greeted and talked to them, asking for autographs without needing to pay for them. Our autograph books were very simple, not too expensive and often homemade. We often had a football to throw around amongst ourselves, usually borrowed from "Friday" Jacklin, the forever Lions team equipment manager, or possibly one of the players. We showed our skills for the pros, our early Lions tryout. Right inside the locker room door was a scale. All the players were required to weigh-in before and after practice, posting their weight on the chart. Most often the players were naked, or wrapped in a towel, especially after a hot, sweaty practice. It was open, very open and no one seemed to care!

The players suited up for practice and walked to the practice fields. The practice fields were across campus. There were no good roads as I recall. Just dirt roads, quite sandy when dry and very muddy when wet. The players walked along the central east side of campus toward Huron River Drive. There wasn't much to see. Huron River Drive was fenced in and grown over with bushes and trees. The practice fields were basically open fields, maybe some field markings and a goal post or two. Not always flat or lush grassy areas. Certainly, there was no artificial grass. Today this area along Huron River Drive looks to be mostly parking lots, grounds facilities and dorms. There was no Bowen Field House. It was heavily wooded and certainly undeveloped. Much of the area around Bowen Field House and Wise Hall area was called "Sleepy Hollow". Cousins Dick Wise and Jim Goodsman, and friends much braver than I, once described this area as a place where the hobos hung out. They made camp there. When the time came, they hopped freight trains to their next destination. Dick said they were very friendly and had great stories, even though they didn't want their parents to know about their visits. To my knowledge, no one disappeared from this scary area and no headless horsemen were ever seen.

We young "assistant coaches" hung out by the locker room doors waiting for the players to walk to the fields. This was a good time to join the players, maybe chat a bit, and of course, ask for autographs. Players were very willing to honor our requests without charge. If you had a bike, you could ask if they would like a ride. Many did. The player would pedal, and we youngsters would be passengers on our bikes and ride where we could fit. Caution: A 275-pound lineman on what we called a 3-speed English bike could be harmful



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to all involved, including the bike. Walking with the players may have been a better option and you could ask to carry the player's helmet as you walked beside them. We didn't have cameras. No cell phones available. Personal photographs were rare. There were very few parents around. We were all on our own. We left home in the morning, checked out things at Recreation Park or a friend's house, went to watch the Lions practice, maybe stop at home and grab a sandwich and a Coke and be off again. I don't recall any major incidences, ever.

At the practice field the players knew the drills and went through their routines. We were free to walk around, stay out of the way and take it all in. Often there were sport's reporters around. We could eavesdrop on their interviews and conversations. Other highlights were being visited by other famous personalities, be it local and state dignitaries, former players, and game announcers. We always made ourselves known to them. When you are the backbone of the "Youthful Lion Entourage" program, one must really eavesdrop. The two local guys that would always draw a crowd were the game announcers, Bob Reynolds and the legendary Van Patrick, who was easy to spot. Mr. Patrick used to do both the Tigers and Lions games on radio and television and simulcast radio and TV at the same time, as I recall. TV was still figuring out how to do these things. If it was a home game, the Lions would be "blacked out" locally on TV. Most every house had a TV antenna on their roof, maybe 20 feet high or more. Later, came adjustable antennas that could be turned electronically to get better reception. Some brave souls even climbed their roofs to hand adjust them. After rooftop antennas came indoor "rabbit ears." Move those rabbit ears around to find the best reception.

Cover them with aluminum foil and hopefully get a boost. We could get some reception aimed at Toledo or Lansing. Usually, it looked like every game was being played in a blizzard. Through it all, Patrick's voice would come through, often statically and always recognizable.

During practice rest and water breaks, players would get comfortable on the ground, get their water and chat. We knew we had to cheer them up and keep them going. And we rested with them. A group of us were sitting around Leon Hart, the All-American tight end and 1949 Heisman winner from Notre Dame. Friend Bruce Allison joined us. His dad owned the Shell station by the Water Tower. Leon asked, "Who is this young man?" I answered, not knowing any better, "This is our friend Brucey." "Brucey? You call him Brucey?" Bruce stood there and Leon, from his restful position on the ground reached over and grabbed Bruce's ankle tightly with one hand, pressured it until Bruce could no longer keep his balance and fell to the ground - uninjured. Brucey went on to play four years at Michigan as a walk-on

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football player and was a member of a Rose Bowl winning team in the 60's.

A couple of our braver early teen buddies would lead us to the dorms between practices when there was nothing else to do, usually, Roger Rendel and Mike Dickerson. We followed like sheep. Finding an open door we entered very quietly. Seeing nobody, our leaders led us further. Still no one in sight, we found a staircase and headed down. There was a recreation room with lots of chairs and couches, a relaxation room and ping pong tables. We explored a bit more. Still quiet and just us.

Mike was a good ping pong player, so we indulged in many games. Many of us were baseball crazy. We easily adapted our equipment to ping pong baseball. Great fun trying to catch up with the actions of a ping pong ball thrown like a baseball and batting with a ping-pong paddle. Lots of laughs and noise. Frustratingly fun. We tired of that. Still, no one around. Very quiet, so we left for other opportunities. It could be we were in the wrong dorm.

Looking back, it seemed a bit strange that we rarely, if ever, saw the players in town or around campus, although my dad owned the Ypsi Tavern and had a few stories of Lion bar-hoppers.

In 1957, George Wilson became head coach of the Lions. His best contribution to our young "Lion's Den" was his son George, very much our same age. He became a "best bud" during practices.

We often lost interest in practice and enjoyed many pick-up games with young George. No problem finding game space or footballs or young players. Great fun and games! Not to be overlooked, young George's dad won the championship in his first year as head coach of the Lions.

After practice outside the locker rooms were more games and youthful drills. I recall quarterbacking a passing drill. My receiver friend ran straight out. I let it fly with a beautiful spiral, well overthrown, but accurate enough to hit the back of a Lion's player on his way to the dorm. My memory was it was the 1955 Heisman Recipient, Howard "Hop-along" Cassidy, the Ohio State star. With a calm, quiet demeanor, he turned and looked without a word and continued as if nothing had happened. On another hot day after practice, a Good Humor Man thought he had found a gold mine. None of us had much to spend and most likely would save it for the Handy Store. All Star receiver Cloyce Box heading to the dorms, stopped and bought his "Cheering Section" an ice cream of our choice.

One special day was picture day. The Lions in full game uniforms headed to Brigg's Field.

This was the day the trading card photographers and the media came to take their publicity pictures. We loved to wander around the field and track to watch. Many of us looked forward to buying our package of trading cards and gnawing on the great bubble gum that came with them. It was an extra bonus when you got a Lions card and you knew immediately exactly where the picture was taken.

With a couple of friends we positioned ourselves in the background as the Ann Arbor News photographer was taking pictures. I was on my knees and my friends standing behind me. I don't recall who was in the picture with me but it was in the paper July 23, 1954, a month after my tenth birthday. We positioned ourselves several yards away between end Dorne Dibble and back Robert "Hunchy" Hoernschemeyer, then followed by back Earl "Jug" Girard and end Frank "Andy" Wodziak, completing the line.

Over the years leading up to the Lions leaving Ypsi, many of our unofficial "Lions Fan Club" looked forward to pre-season football camp. Many of the Lions remembered us from year to year. We followed them closely and hoped our favorites would not be

Celebrating 50 Years In Ypsilanti!

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traded or retire. The last practice before breaking from pre-season camp was a light practice on Brigg's Field. We wandered freely. I recall at the end of one Brigg's practice they had a timed quarter mile run around the track. We watched as each completed their lap. Many of us began to giggle as the last player crossed the finish line. It was Lions "Man- and-a-Half" middle guard Les Bingaman. Our giggles were quickly halted as team members chastised us for our thoughtless outburst. Mr. Bingaman was the league's heaviest player weighing in on a freight scale near the practice fields at 350 pounds. No one ran through the center of the Lions defensive line.

As the regular season closed in, the Lions were breaking camp. It was a special time as we wished our special players a good season. My special player friend was number 28, Yale Lary. For some reason we took a liking to each other. Maybe it was that I was one of the smallest of the group. Maybe it was the way he combed his hair back in a special way. In the middle of his Hall of Fame career he spent two years in the military, as many did then. I was anxious to greet him when he returned. He remembered me.

The last practice before leaving Ypsi for good and moving into the regular season was a special time. We knew very well they were not coming back. The activity we looked forward to that got us excited closing the pre-season was the Lions giving away all their footballs. The balls were thrown, kicked, whatever and they were flying all over the place. You had to scramble to get one. We young guys ran wildly to grab one. Superb punter, Yale Lary walked toward me. He reached out and handed me the ball he was carrying and we walked back to the locker room together. Amazing!!! I kept that ball for a long time. I could not resist the urge to play with it. I knew it was special and I should have displayed it or hidden it away. It got terribly worn out and I finally let it go. I don't know who got the most enjoyment and pleasure from those times. The players having us around them and chatting with us or us being around such great athletes, watching the pros and learning so many things from them that maybe none of us really thought about at the time. I know we walked and talked and admired at least four Heisman Trophy recipients and at least six NFL Hall of Fame inductees.

The Lions organization packed up after their last practice in Ypsi in 1957 and relocated to Cranbrook. They left the blue collar, hardworking factory workers, the World War II "Arsenal of Democracy" Willow Run and the B-24 Liberator and of course, the home of Rosie the Riveters.

The"HEX" of leaving Ypsilanti! Cranbrook??? I don't know who benefited the most being in Ypsilanti, the championship Lions players or my gang, the blue collar, hardworking Ypsilanti boys' summer support group? Lions quarterback Bobby Layne, after being traded to the Steelers allegedly, (although never officially proven) cursed his team by saying, "The Lions will not win another championship for 50 years!" Actually, Layne was injured in the last regular season game. He broke his ankle and never quarterbacked the 1957 Lions in the championship game, so that quote is suspect. That honor belongs to backup quarterback Tobin Rote. He led the Lions to victories in their final three games including the lopsided victory in the championship game against the Cleveland Browns, 59- 14, the 25th NFL Championship Game on December 29th, 1957. Each of the Browns players earned $2,750 and the Lions players $4,295 for participating in the final game.

Not many of our young Lions "groupies" are still with us. So many of those neighborhood young athletes from that era accomplished a great deal visiting practices. The spirit rubbed off on townsfolks, young players, coaches, parents and more. It was in the air. Ypsilanti High School produced many state championship teams in a variety of sports. Many local athletes went on to be state champs, college athletes and members of their college league champions. Several made it to the pros and became All-Pros, and two members of Super Bowl teams.

Success follows success…and all of us from the same general neighborhoods of Ypsilanti.

After nearly 60 years in her West Cross home, Mom was slipping into dementia and required assisted living. She moved to the Huron Woods facility. She received great care. A new resident caught my interest, Dr. Dave Middleton, an important member of the 1957 Detroit Lion Championship team. He was the Lions first round pick and the 12th overall selection in the 1955 NFL draft. He received special permission to pursue his medical degree, often missing pre-season and early regular season games. In spite of that, he was a Lions leading receiver and caught a TD pass in the 1957 Championship game. In his later years, he suffered a severe stroke. During visits to Huron Woods, we talked briefly with his wife, Mrs. Middleton, about our days in Ypsi, the training camps, and my friends' visiting practices. They were memorable times. I recall, one special moment when Mrs. Middleton asked, "David, show these friends your ring." Dave's face lit up and a smile spread across his face as he lifted his hand proudly displaying his 1957 NFL Championship ring.

So what happened in 2007? Did the fifty year curse expire? Did the Bobby Layne Curse come to an end? The Lions completed their 7th consecutive losing season with a 7-9 record. The following year, 2008, the Lions completed their 8th consecutive losing season, a record breaking 0-16. Let's close the book on the 1957 Lion's championship year. It's time for the Lions to make the Super Bowl and begin a new record in 2026. Will the Lions make 2026 one in a row or 69 in a row? Maybe I'm just another octogenarian living in the past and the way it used to be. But... that's the way it used to be....

(Tino Lambros grew up in Ypsilanti and has written several articles about his boyhood memories.)

Letter from the Museum Advisory Board

BY NANCY BALOGH

The Ramsay Dollhouse was made for Jane Bird Schmiedeke by her father Russell Ramsay in 1938 when Jane was five years old. The dollhouse was donated to the Ypsilanti Historical Museum this past year by Jane's family. It came with a notebook containing a written history and inventory list. Jane took pictures of each room so that items could be placed exactly how they were originally intended. Some items, such as the organ in the parlor were made from prefabricated kits *(see photo below)*. There were 412 pieces altogether *(yes, I counted them)* and 16 clothespin dolls. It took the museum staff many hours to place them according to the photographs provided in the notebook. I encourage anyone who finds this exhibit of interest to stop by the museum and see the dollhouse which is located at the top of the stairs on the second floor.

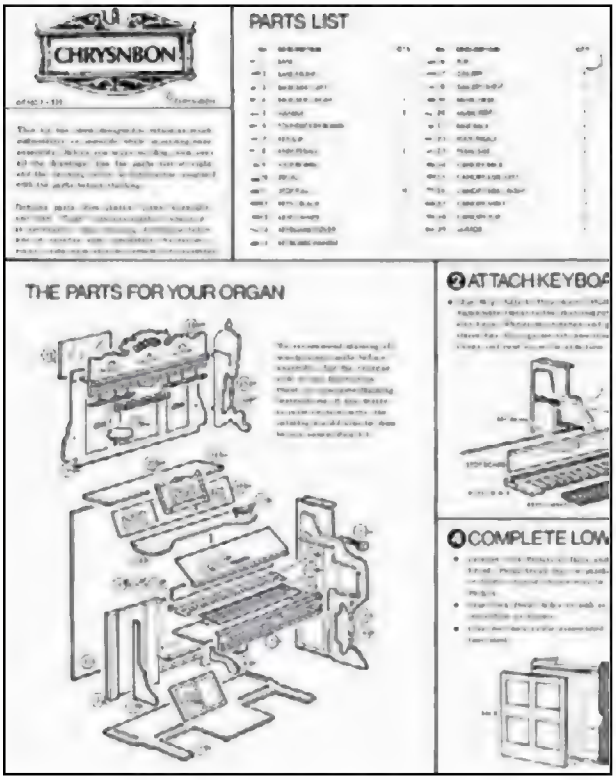
The museum would like to welcome new docents: Cheryl Brooks, Robert Anschuetz, Lilla Morrison, Tom Hubbard, Jessica Sieloff, Dave Farquharson and Kasen Saul. Thank you to Rick Katon who volunteered to provide training.

We are all grateful that E.M.U. continues its partnership with the museum and we welcome new intern Catherine Sanford, a first-year graduate student in the Historic Preservation Program. *(see photo in President's Report page 2.)*

The Museum Advisory Board would like to thank Dave Mongson for his many years of service as both a docent and board member. Virginia Davis Brown suggested that Dave become a docent in 2014. In 2015 Dave was elected to the Museum Advisory Board. Dave's departure leaves a vacancy on the board. If you have an interest in filling this position please contact the museum at yhs.museum@gmail.com for more information.

An exciting new exhibit is coming! Through a partnership with E.M.U., graduate students from the Historic Preservation Program will be creating and installing a new exhibit. This temporary exhibit will evolve over the year to re-create a bedroom of a typical Rosie the Riveter worker. Yes, the museum house at one time was the living quarters of workers from the Willow Run Bomber Plant. Stay tuned for this ambitious project.

The Ramsay Dollhouse, circa 1938, donated by Jane Bird Schmiedeke.



Instructions for the organ located in the dollhouse parlor. There were 29 pieces to assemble in the kit.

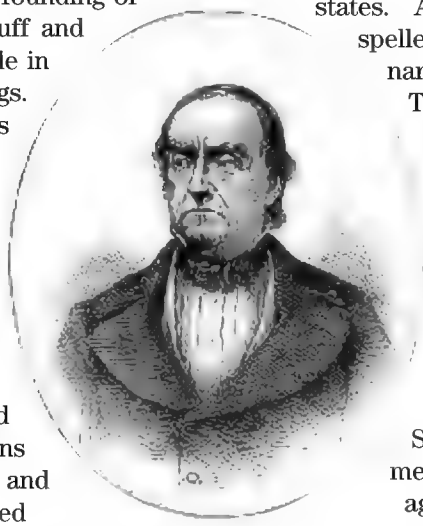
Ypsilanti's 200th Birthday and the Origins of the Land it Sits Upon

BY JANICE ANSCHUETZ

Potawatomi Chief Metea, who eloquently and intelligently spoke for the tribes of people which opposed the 1821 Treaty of Chicago.

If you didn't get a chance to celebrate the "official" 200th birthday of Ypsilanti in 2023, never fear. Some local historians, including me, believe that Ypsilanti was founded in 1825 and thus the REAL birthday would be this year – 2025. If you are a "party person" you can celebrate twice if you so choose. Please let me explain why I am wishing Ypsilanti a happy 200th birthday this year, even though I did my best to wish it a wonderful and prosperous birthday in 2023 with my new bicentennial shirt. I also wrote a chapter of the book Ypsilanti Histories: A Look Back at the Last Fifty Years, which is available in the museum archives. If you like a good and true story, please continue reading and you will learn not only about the 1825 origins of our city, but also how the land that our city was originally taken from the Native Americans who once dwelled here.

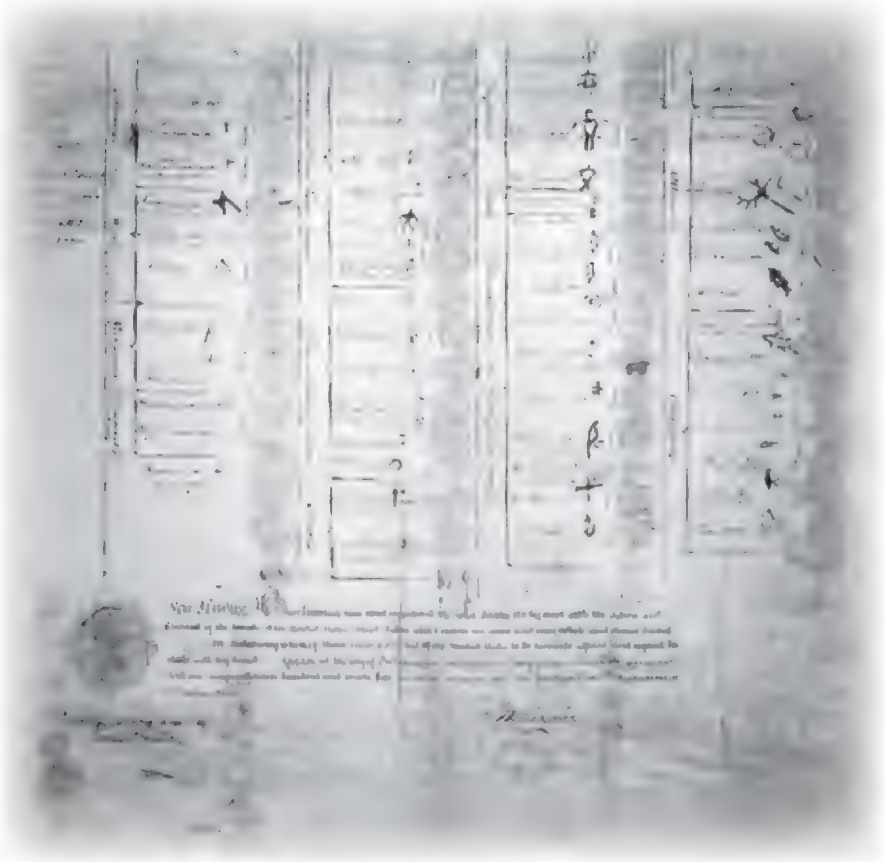
My son, Robert Anschuetz, wrote an interesting and well-documented Gleanings article about the 1823 founding of Woodruff's Grove titled Benjamin Woodruff and Woodruff's Grove. You can read the article in the Summer 2023 edition of the Gleanings. The city of Ypsilanti officially celebrates its founding in 1823, however, only a portion of Woodruff's Grove would later be annexed into Ypsilanti, and the city of Ypsilanti wasn't officially platted until 1825. Woodruff's Grove was in an area southeast of downtown Ypsilanti, and is mainly in what is now Ypsilanti Township. Part of this land had been an Indian village and the native inhabitants had cleared the land for their crops of corn, pumpkins and beans which made it convenient for Woodruff and others who purchased land from the United States government to plant the fields.



Lewis Cass, who "negotiated" the treaty of Chicago with numerous Indian tribes that had lived for generations on the land where Ypsilanti was built.

In this article I will tell you what I have learned about how the land that our city of Ypsilanti is built on came to be and the person who founded Ypsilanti in 1825. We first need to know a little bit about the United States and its treaties with both the English crown and the Native American people. This is only a brief summary and more information can be easily found online. First came the Revolutionary War with Great Britain surrounding all of their interests in the land south of Canada, including what became the territory of Michigan. However, the problem was that the native population, which had been hunting and living and using this extensive property for a thousand years, was not party to this peace treaty. Separate negotiations were in order. This was a complicated task involving the new government and the numerous tribes of Indians including the Wyandot, Delaware, Shawnee, Ottawa, Chippewa, Potawatomi, Miami, Eel River, Wea, Kickapoo, Piankeshaw and Kaskaskia, which were the tribes prominent in what is now Michigan and the surrounding states. Although many of these tribal names are spelled differently in various history books and narratives, these were the tribes listed in the Treaty of Peace negotiated at Fort Greenville, Ohio Country in the year 1795.

The purpose of this Treaty of Greenville was to "put an end to destructive war, to settle all controversies and to restore harmony and a friendly intercourse between the said United States and Indians." General Anthony Wayne represented the newly formed United States of America with various chiefs, warriors and Sachems representing the Indian tribes that met together at the fort in Greenville, Ohio, to agree to terms on this lengthy peace settlement. Among the articles of the settlement was a prisoner exchange and the establishment of a boundary line which would take away from the indigenous people most of



The Treaty of Chicago was signed on August 29, 1821 by Native American leaders using pictograph signatures. Those who signed it were considered "traitors" by the majority of Indians who objected to having their homeland sold under duress.

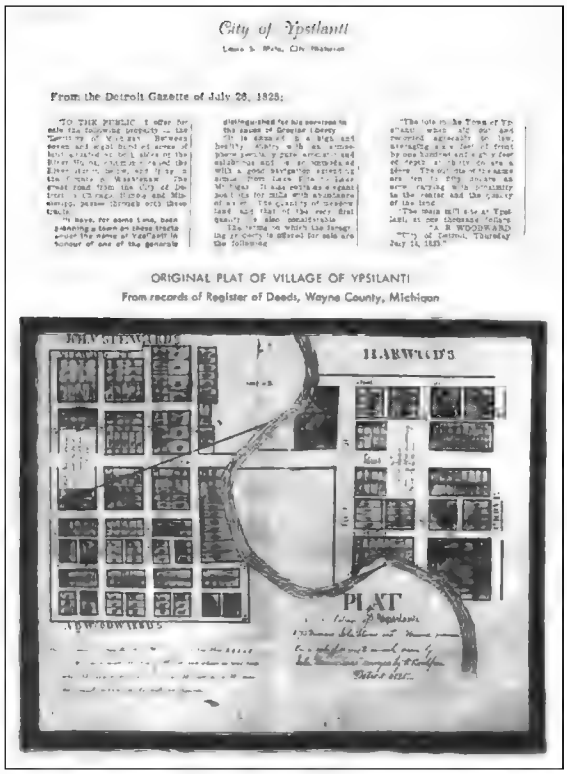
the land which is now Michigan and Ohio.

Some say that the Native Americans in this area did not seem to care or even know about who had won the Revolutionary War and the result being that "their land" could be claimed by the victor. As for the Treaty of Greenville and subsequent treaties, the majority of the native Americans were against the terms and believed that the Indians had given or sold as much land as was needed by their "white brothers" and that those who had "agreed" to these terms were traitors.

The Greenville treaty was followed in 1821 by the Treaty of Chicago which was signed by Lewis Cass, Michigan Territorial Governor, and Solomon Sibley, who represented the United Sates, as well as leaders of the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi Council of Three Fires. This was considered a triumph for the United States and a death blow for Native Americans. In essence it took away all lands in the Michigan Territory with the exception of several small reservations. Even so, greedy land agents were said to fool Indians into giving up even these small parcels by filing false lawsuits against them in court for something like "stealing a cow" and then paying a judge to rule in their favor. This allowed the confiscation of Indian land which had been given to them in this treaty as a payment to the agents.

A great source of writings about Indian land is found in a book titled History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan - A grammar of Their Language, and Personal and Family History of the Author written in 1897 by Andrew J. Blackbird and published in Ypsilanti by the Ypsilantian Job Printing House. Blackbird was 100% Ottawa, son of an Ottawa

chief who had put their language into written form and taught the adults in his tribe how to read and write it. Blackbird, whose Indian name was officially Chief Mack-E-Te-Be-Nessy, was educated at the Normal College in Ypsilanti and in his book, he writes of living here while going to college and working at menial jobs to pay for his board, tuition and food. I found this little book which has been republished several times a very interesting viewpoint and it gives insight into how the Native Americans respected, used and lived on the land that our city is built on.


City of Ypsilanti

From the Detroit Gazette of July 26, 1825:

ORIGINAL PLAT OF VILLAGE OF YPSILANTI
From records of Register of Deeds, Wayne County, Michigan

The original ad that Augustus Woodward placed in a Detroit newspaper showing a map and offering the land in the village of Ypsilanti for sale and his reason for naming it.

The injustice in this treaty seems apparent and we can read the reaction by Potawatomi Chief Metea in defense of his position and that of the majority of Indians which he represented in considering the white man's Treaty of Chicago. It is worth reading in its entirety which can be found online, and reflects how the native people felt about his "treaty" which had them giving so much for so little – including the land which is now Ypsilanti.

Chief Metea spoke: "My Father - We have listened to what you have said. We shall now retire to our camps and consult upon it. You will hear nothing more from us at present. [Author's Note: This is a custom that Native Americans practiced in allowing their fellow tribesmen to consider a treaty or offer]. Then when the treaty council met again, he continued: "We meet you here today, because we had promised it, to tell you our minds, and what we have agreed upon among ourselves. You will listen to us with a good mind, and believe what we say. You know that we first came to this country, a long time ago and when we sat ourselves down upon it, we met with a great many hardships and difficulties. Our country was then very large, but it has dwindled away to a small spot, and you wish to purchase that! This has caused us to reflect much upon what you have told us; and we have, therefore, brought all the chiefs and warriors, and the young men and women and children of our tribe, that one part may not do what others object to, and that all may be witnesses of what is going forward."

Chief Metea then reminds the Americans that the Indians have given and sold them much of their land and that when they did that they were "young and foolish." He talks about the elders that have died and that to sell any more land would "offend their spirits, if we sell our lands; and we are fearful we shall offend you, if we do not sell them. This has caused us great perplexity of thought, because we have counseled among ourselves, and do not know how we can part with the land. Our Country was given to us by the Great Spirit, who gave it to us to hunt upon, to make our cornfields upon, to live upon, and to make down our beds upon when we die. And he would never forgive us, should we bargain it away." He reminds them that they have already sold them great tracts of land which they will have forever.

Chief Metea continues "We are growing uneasy. What lands you have, you may retain forever, but we shall sell no more. You think, perhaps, that I speak in passion; but my heart is good towards you. I speak like one of your own children. I am an Indian, a red-skin, and live by hunting and fishing, but my country is already too small; and I do not know how to bring up my children…We sold you a fine tract of land at St. Mary's. We said to you then it was enough to satisfy your children, and the last we should sell; and we thought it would be the last you would ask for." Chief Metea concluded with the hope that the Indians and white men who wished for his land could leave the meeting with handshake and the understanding that enough land had been sold or surrendered. Well, this did not happen and it seems that enough threats to the Indian people if they did not agree with the terms of sale were dire leaving them little choice but to agree to them. Thus, the land that Ypsilanti is now located on became available for sale by the United States government in 1823 and available for settlement by white people.

Once the United States government surveyed the territory of Michigan, opened a land office in Detroit and officially put the Ypsilanti land up for sale around 1825, out came the land speculators and immigrants too. Among them a wealthy Judge, Augustus Woodward of Detroit, for whom Woodward Avenue is named. Woodward and his investment partners, along with others, were able to purchase land in this area for only 23 cents an acre. There is no evidence that Woodward ever stepped foot on "his property" in the proposed village of Ypsilanti, but he quickly purchased the land from the land office in Detroit and had it divided into parcels which would create the village of Ypsilanti. Thus, the birth of the village of Ypsilanti was in 1825. On July 26, 1825, Woodward placed an advertisement in the Detroit Gazette

Judge Augustus Woodward is called the "father" of Ypsilanti. However, there is no evidence that he ever took the difficult journey from Detroit to view the land that he purchased from the United States government as a money-making land development business.

newspaper that read as follows:

TO THE PUBLIC: I offer for sale the following property in the Territory of Michigan. Between seven and eight hundred acres of land situated on both sides of the River Huron, commonly called the River Huron below, and lying in the county of Washtenaw. The great road from the city of Detroit to Chicago, Illinois and Mississippi passes through both these tracts.

I have for some time been planning a town on these tracts under the name of Ypsilanti in honour of one of the generals distinguished for his services in the cause of Grecian liberty.

It is situated in a high and healthy country with an atmosphere peculiarly pure, aromatic and salubrious and is accommodated with a good navigation extending almost from Lake Erie to Lake Michigan. It also contains elegant positions for mills with abundance of water. The quantity of meadow land, and that of the very first quality, is also considerable.

The terms on which the foregoing property is offered for sale are the following:

The lots In the Town of Ypsilanti, when laid out and recorded agreeably to law, averaging sixty feet of front by one hundred and eighty feet of depth, at thirty dollar a piece. The out-lots of the same are ten to fifty dollars an acre, varying with proximity to the center and the quality of the land.

The main mill sites at Ypsilanti at one thousand dollars.

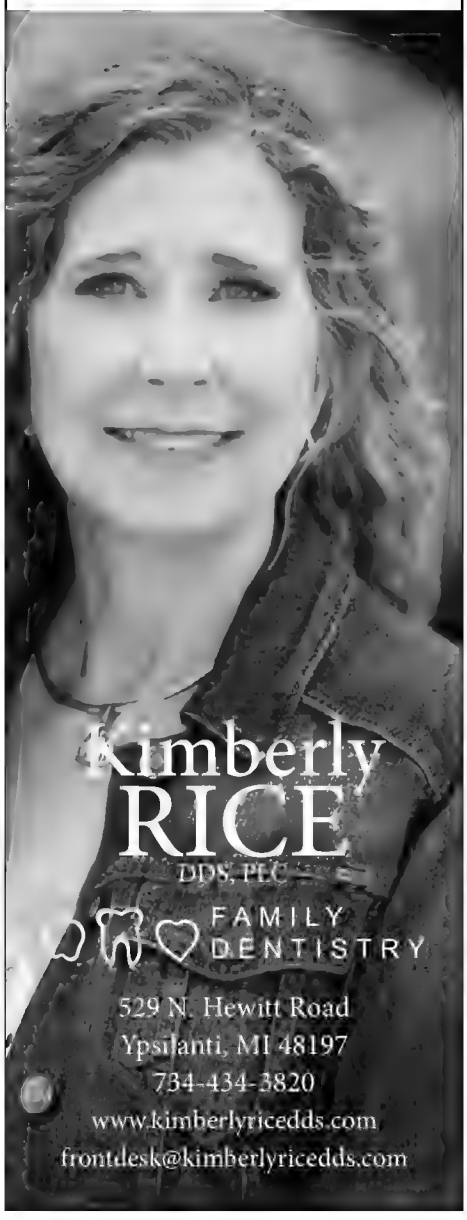
A. B. Woodard, City of Detroit, Thursday, July 14, 1825.

Readers of this article may be interested in a small book titled "The Indians of Washtenaw County" researched and written by W. B. Hinsdale of the University of Michigan in 1927 under the heading "Do We Owe the Indians Anything?" Hinsdale presents the argument that "Right or wrong, the world over, from the most ancient time to 1927, weaker races of men have had to give way to the stronger. It is inevitable, so soon as America became known to white people, that white people would possess the land. The Indian had to give up his possessions and get out of the way by reason of the inexorable law that primitive cul-

Welcome to the Neighborhood!

We have been serving and supporting our community for over 20 years. Our office is centrally located at 529 N. Hewitt Road between Packard Road and Washtenaw Avenue.

Stop by and visit. If we haven't met, we welcome new patients. We provide professional family dental care with an emphasis on prevention. If you are new to the area, please check out our website for a map and directions to our office.



Andrew J. Blackbird, known to his Ottawa tribe as Chief Mack-E-Te-Be-Nessy, was the author of the book "History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan" which is available on Google Books. He attended the Normal College in Ypsilanti and his book was published in Ypsilanti. His father put the Ottawa language into written form and held classes for tribesmen to learn to read and write it.

tures must yield to those more complex and better organized, unless in some menial capacity he could serve his supplants, and the Indian's disposition did not make him a useful servant or "mixer" in citizenship. Indians were not the chosen people to inherit the earth. If we owe them anything, one debt is for the land itself. They have given to us or we have taken over from them some very valuable property besides…When the first travelers came into the land, Indians served as guides and their trails were the roads traveled. In this way they contributed to the advancement of civilization and at the same time were taking the path to their own sad destiny as a race."

Either the Native Americans did not know or perhaps they did not care that the land was no longer free for them to live or travel on. When Joseph and Sophia Peck and their two small boys arrived from a death-defying journey from New York to the land they purchased which was bordered by Forest Avenue, the Huron River, Prospect Street and Holmes Road, and established a homestead called Peckville. Indians still migrated each spring and autumn through Ypsilanti camping at River Street and Forest Avenue. It should be remembered that River Street was then part of the Potawatomi Trail which continued onto Clark Road to LeForge Road and then on to Geddes Road. I wrote of their journey and land claim in an article titled Peckville in the Spring 2010 Gleanings, which was updated in an article titled Peckville and the Peck Family in the Spring 2023 Gleanings.

The Peck family, who lived on their farmland until the 1940s, passed along some accounts of living among the Indians on their land grant. The Peck family did not find them a threat or a problem except for two incidents. One day an Indian squaw with her baby in a papoose came up to the Peck property. Jokingly, Sophia Peck asked the Indian woman if she would trade her pretty baby for Mrs. Peck's baby son Erwin. Quick as a flash, an unexpected exchange of babies was made. Sophia's husband Joseph was called to retrieve poor Erwin. Joseph went through the woods in search of his son Erwin, and upon finding the squaw holding his son, he managed to convince her that the trade wasn't meant to be permanent. The babies were traded again and reunited with their families. The Pecks had friendly relations with their Indian neighbors who were curious about how the white people lived. Indian women liked to enter the cabin and watch Sophia cook. One day they were fascinated by her baking bread and when it was done, she offered each a slice of the fresh bread spread with butter. The Indian women took a bite of the bread and then spit out the butter onto her freshly scrubbed pine floor which was quickly stained when absorbing the warm melted butter. Seeing how upset his wife Sophia was, her husband, Joseph cleaned up the mess on her floor by putting sand on the stains and rubbing them until they again were stain-free.

Another early settler, Jothan Goodell, who I wrote about in an article titled Jothan & Aurilla Stevens Goodell in the Fall 2024 Gleanings, stated that he had been warned not to come to Michigan territory because of the danger from the native people. He soon learned that the remaining Indians were no problem but that wolves and bears persisted in showing no fear of humans and a hunger for his livestock and crops. Goodell and his wife made sure that their rifle was always ready to fight them off.

Over 50 years ago, two of my neighbors, Frank Lidke and Bill Helzerman, who were cousins and had been born on Forest Avenue near River Street,

Pat Walters & Sons
HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING SPECIALISTS
636 S. Mansfield Ave.
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Tel: (734) 483-5811
Fax: (734) 483-9701

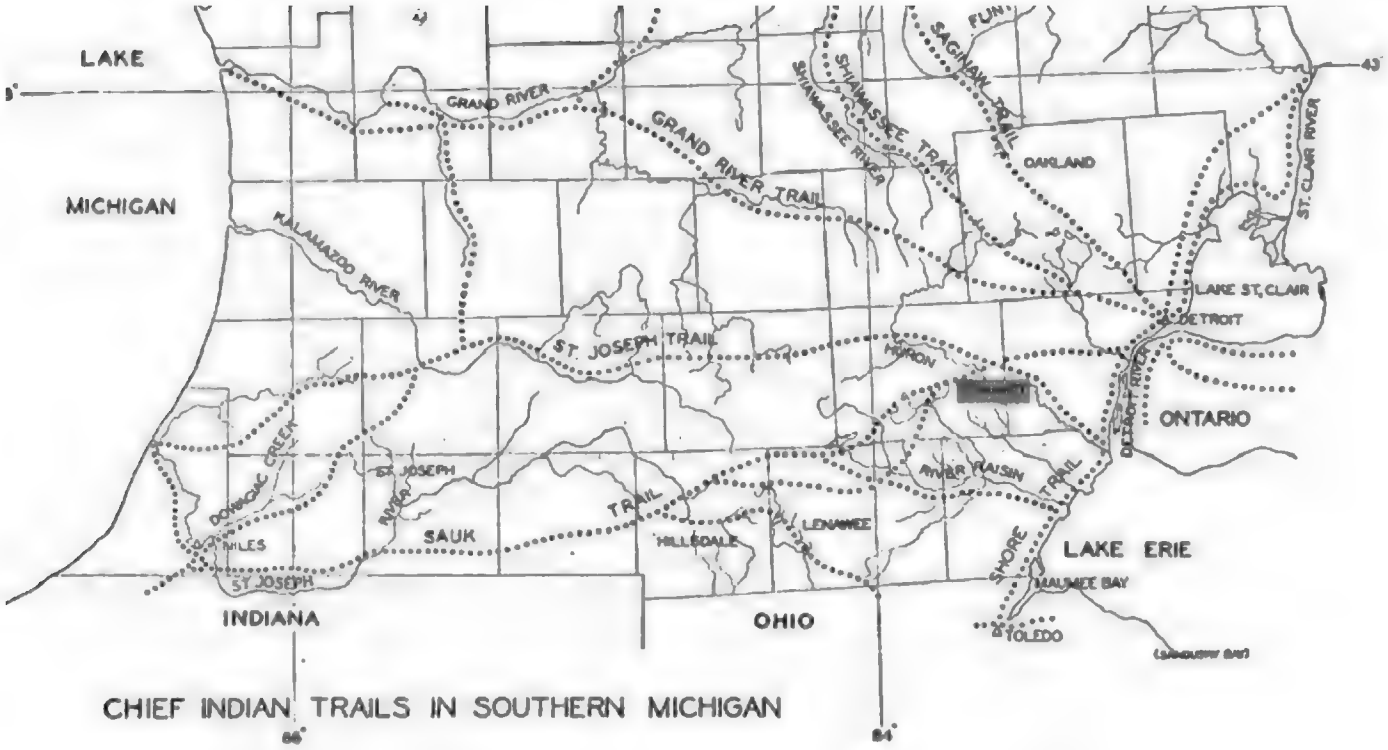
told me a story about Ypsilanti Native Americans. They told me that around the turn of the century, when they were boys, Indians continued to travel down River Street each year on their journey to other parts of Michigan and back, and would set up camp where the Catholic Cemetery is now located on Clark Road and River Street - remember this is the route of the Potawatomi Trail. The young men of the tribe would play baseball with the town boys and the Indian women would trade hand woven baskets for items like eggs from shopkeepers and housewives in Ypsilanti. They even asked me to visit another one of their cousins to learn more about these encounters, which I did.

Sophia Peck, wife of Joseph Peck, who came to Ypsilanti in 1823. Sophia's son, Erwin Peck, was temporarily swapped with an Indian baby through a misunderstanding.

Now, back to our story. We left off with land being sold in Ypsilanti in 1825 after the Treaty of Chicago with Woodward purchasing, designing and naming the village of Ypsilanti. However, laws soon changed, as if the Treaty of Chicago, which forced Indigenous people to live in small reservations was not humiliating enough. In 1830 the congress and Andrew Jackson agreed to the Indian Removal Act – this time without the consent of any native people. We have all heard of the Cherokee "Trail of Tears" when gold was discovered on Cherokee land in the Appalachians and the Cherokee were forcibly removed from their land. In a similar manner, Michigan and other Midwest states were remembered for the "Trail of Death" when government soldiers rounded up rogue Indians not living in one of the few crowded reservations in Michigan and "escorted" them to Kansas to die or miserably live out the rest of their days.

All of these so-called agreements of promises made and broken and treaties made and ignored can easily be read about on the internet. So, as we celebrate, once again, Ypsilanti's 200th birthday in 2025, at the same time let us reflect on the fact that the land that our city was built on was taken from the native people who respected their Mother Earth.

Janice Anschuetz has a Bachelor's degree from EMU with majors in history and sociology as well as a Master's of Social Work from U of M. She has written over 60 articles for the Gleanings and continues to read and study the history of Ypsilanti. Janice and her husband Bob were one of the first families to move into the red-lined area on Ypsilanti's east side, purchasing the Swaine House at the corner of Forest and River which was slated for demolition and lovingly restored it to its former glory. She worked tirelessly as one of the founding members of the Historic East Side Association and helped to change the zoning back to single family. It is now what it was once – a beautiful neighborhood of gardens and people.



This map shows the primary Indian trails of Lower Michigan. The Potowatomi Trail was the eastern extension of the St. Joseph Trail from near Pinckney to Lake Erie and roughly paralleled the Huron River. The Sauk Trail is also shown on this map as it led from Detroit to Chicago, roughly along the path of present-day Michigan Avenue. The Potowatomi Trail and Sauk Trail intersected near what is now Ypsilanti.

YPSILANTI MUSEUMS

Michigan Firehouse Museum
110 W. Cross St. – Ypsilanti 48197
734 547-0663
www.michiganfirehousemuseum.org

Hours: 12 to 4 Thursday thru Sunday
Admission (online pricing):
Adults - $10 • Kids - $5 • Kids (under 5) Free

Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum
100 E. Cross St. – Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734 482-5200
www.ypsiautoheritage.org

Hours: 1 to 4 Thursday thru Sunday
Admission: Adults - $10 • Kids (under 12) Free

Ypsilanti History Center House Museum & Archives
220 N. Huron St. – Ypsilanti, MI 48197
Museum 734 482-4990
Archives – 734 217-8236
www.ypsihistory.org

Hours: 2 to 5 Tuesday thru Saturday
Admission: Adults – Free Kids – Free

Michigan Flight Museum
47884 D St. - Belleville, MI 48111
734 483-4030
www.miflightmuseum.org

Hours: 10 to 4 Tuesday thru Saturday
11 to 4 Sunday
Admission: Museum Members – Free
Adults - $13 • Seniors (60+) & Vets - $10
Kids (3 to 17) - $10 • Kids (Under 3) – Free

Jennie and her family moved to Ann Arbor in 1857.
(Courtesy of E.M.U. Archives)

DIARY OF *Jennie Pease D'Ooge* JOURNAL #1

BY PEG PORTER

Longtime readers of Gleanings may remember the Lambie diaries first published in the 1960s. William Lambie was a Scottish immigrant who farmed in Superior Township. He recorded farm life and visits to town in the 1860s.

Now in collaboration with the Eastern Michigan University Archives we are publishing excerpts from the diaries of Jennie Pease D'Ooge. Born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, she grew up in Ann Arbor where she met and married Benjamin D'Ooge a graduate of the University of Michigan and Classical Languages scholar.

Jennie's Diaries contain a record of her life from 1886 until the early 1930s. In many ways she represents the "new woman" who emerged in the second half of the 19th century. She is educated and engaged in the larger community. Her husband is her partner who supports her interests and involvement beyond the strictly domestic. In addition, she engages in the activities of a Victorian-era gentlewoman including making and receiving social calls, sketching, playing lawn tennis, and choral singing.

This first collection of excerpts from Journal #1 opens with Jennie and husband Benjamin living in Coldwater where he is the principal of the high school. He becomes a candidate for the post of Classical Languages Professor at Michigan State Normal College in Ypsilanti, a position which he eventually obtained after some political wrangling. The young couple then moves to Ypsilanti. Jennie is pregnant with their first child ("my current condition"). Now a faculty wife she develops friends with other wives, most notably Sarah George, as well as others through church and the Ladies Literary Club.

Jennie's diaries offer a portrait of Ypsilanti as a college town.

Some names in this selection:

The Angells, James Angell was the President of the University of Michigan.

Mrs. George (Sarah) wife of Austin George, principal of the Training School.

Mrs. Putnam (Sarah) Founder of the Ladies' Literary Club.

The Strongs, Edwin Atson who founded the physics department and was married to Harriet Jane Pomeroy.

Excerpts from Journal #1, 1886

March 23, 1886

I have not kept a journal since my last year in school – ('73?) although I have threatened, many times, to do so. As this is my birthday, it seems an appropriate time to commence a chronicle of events.

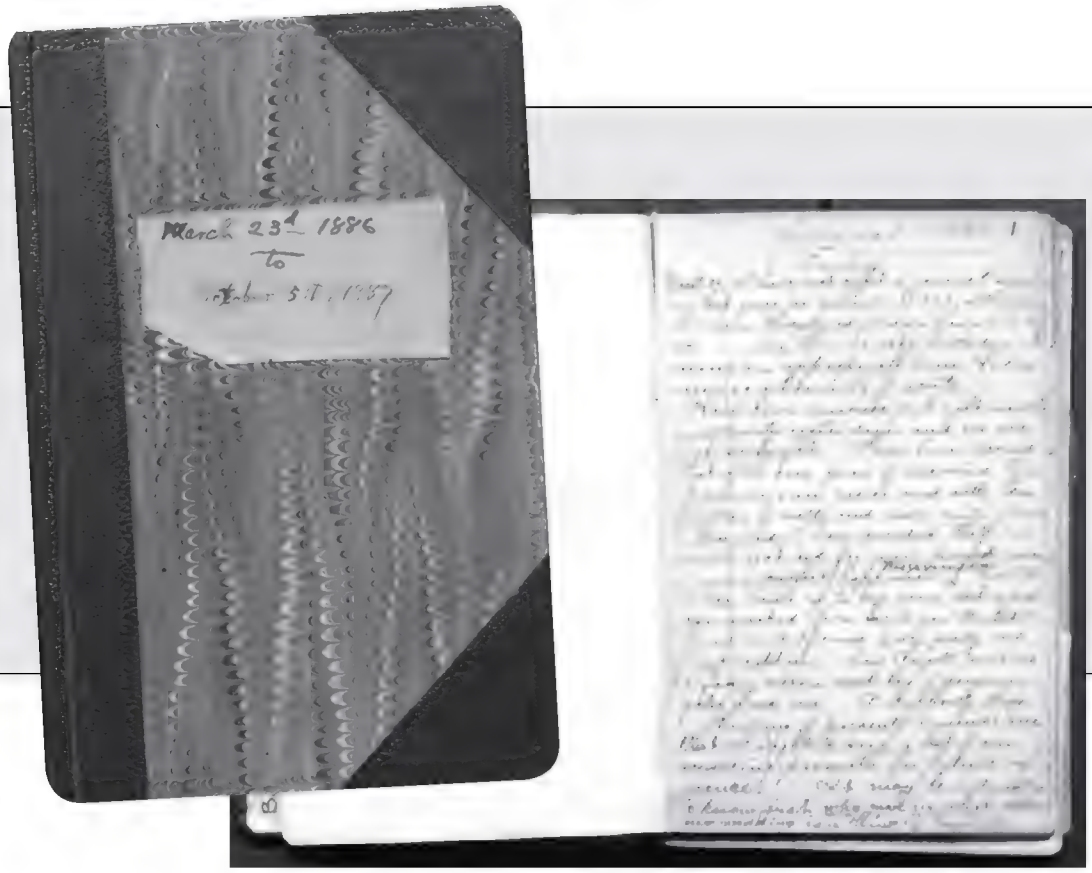


Photo of Jennie's first journal, Mar. 23rd, 1886 – Oct. 5th, 1887. Her first entry was on her birthday. *(Courtesy of E.M.U. Archives)*

Have been married just eight months and twenty-eight days, and we are 1 run easier and with less friction of wills and more unity of mind. Ben and I have decided that we could not ask for more perfect union – more perfect happiness. Mais ça va sans dire! [French: "But it goes without saying!"]

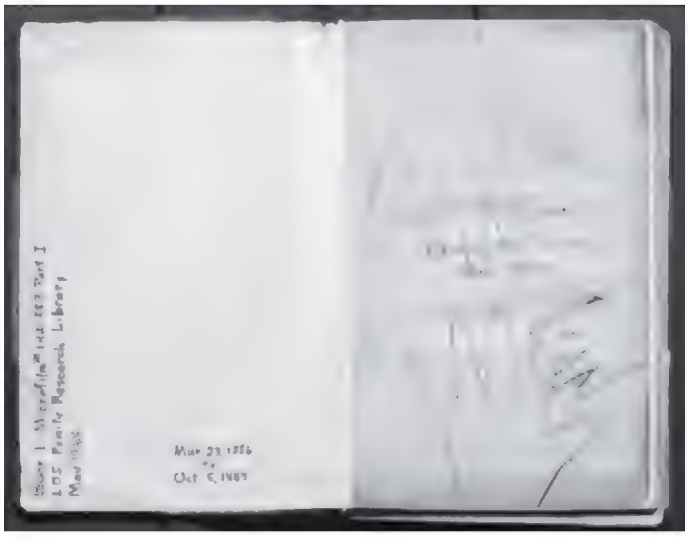
This A.M. Ida [Jennie's sister] came up to my room with a package marked "from me to you" Mar. 23d. '86. And in it I found 1/2 doz. pretty red fruit napkins. Lois Angell sent me a fancy ribbon work-bag of gorgeous gold and red. A very pretty thing. Thinking of presents reminds me that I ought to keep a list of our wedding-presents, for future reference. It may be interesting to know just who gave me what when our wedding is a thing of "long ago."

April 19, 1886

Mended up my old black silk – and expect to get much good out of it this season. Sewing on my tennis-dress. In afternoon, Ida and I called on Bessie West and chum. Expected to find Miss Strong of Ypsilanti with her, but she went home in the A.M.

Ben continues to receive letters of encouragement from different men of prominence in the state, with regard to the position at Ypsi. He has received letters of recommendation from Pres. Angell, Pres. Adams, Judge Cooley, Regent McGowan and from the press, and pulpit, beside all the leading teachers in the State. I tell him I know he will get the place, and we have wagered a dollar to that effect. Of course B. thinks he will not succeed.

He is not going to the Battle Creek Convention tomorrow, but to Ypsi. on business.



Drawing by Jennie on the inside cover of the first journal. *(Courtesy of E.M.U. Archives)*

I went up to Judge Cooley's a minute this afternoon, to inquire after Mr. Horton. He seems about the same, and looks better, although his paralyzed side continues to be helpless. He can talk better, I think.

June 25, 1886

One year ago today, we were married; and so we tried to celebrate our first anniversary by a picnic of three, up the river. It rained but we did not mind, very much. We ate our lunch on a steep side hill, in a shower, forgot the butter for our bread – and had nothing for the old gentleman to drink – but we had a good time fishing, sketching, and gathering flowers.

We were glad that we went, because Ida had not been on the river for years.

Reached home about nine o'clock.

July 23, 1886

Red Letter Day

To market for beef, tomatoes, berries, etc. Got a rump piece – and cooked it myself – à la Ida's roasting process.

Ben came home about twelve in the morning, with his dear eyes sticking out, and announced that he had been appointed to the Ypsilanti position and Mr. Ballou, of the State Board, was coming to dine with us. There was a general hurry and scurry to get little ma's hair combed and plan a grand dinner on such short notice. Did very well, too, with four courses – and the old fellow (Ballou) did not use his napkin. Guess he liked his dinner though. B. took him for a ride in the afternoon, and we were both so unstrung by the day's events that we hardly slept a wink at night. After tea, we played croquet – "little ma" joining with great zeal. How few women there are at seventy who are so young – especially after having fifteen children.

September 8, 1886

Hot day for moving. Ben rode with Emil (our? new boy) and the teamster, on the load; and Ida, Polly and I took the gasoline stove, lamp, guitar, etc. in Gelston's light wagon. Not a good day for the race. We could have done nothing without dear little Ida-pap. She rushed us all through, and, in spite of delays, at night we had the matting down in two rooms, and the furniture in, and the boxes of books, etc. on the porch. It rained, in the night, but all was safe.

Polly was to stay and help me a few days, but was homesick, and couldn't.

September 29, 1886

Worked on that dressing-case all the morning. Mrs. George came for me to go to club; at Mrs. Walton's. Met several bright interesting women. They talked about Claudius, Caligula, Nero, Seneca etc., about 50 B.C. to 60 A.D.

Jennie as a young woman, 1879. *(Courtesy of E.M.U. Archives)*

We went down street, afterwards: Mrs. George, Sherman, Crawford, Loomis and me. Found, on my return that Ida had been here, and gone again. Found traces of the blessed girl in every room. Also Miss Van Cleve and Miss Lamb called. And, in the eve, Miss Pierce & Miss McMahon,

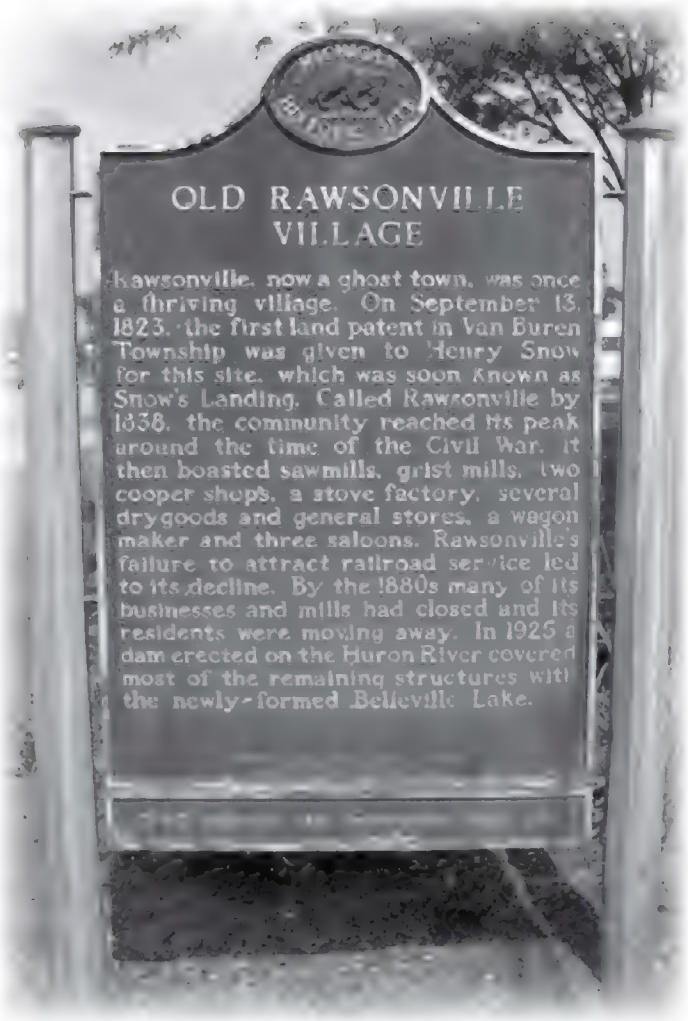
December 31, 1886

B. came home in the early morning. Poor old boy got left last night and had to stay at the hotel in A.A. all night. Was glad to see my D.O.B. home again. Received our box of Christmas things from Grand Rapids. It was a great surprise, after having received the sewing machine. In the evening we were at regent Whitman's, watching out the Old Year. Had progressive euchre, dancing, singing, and a lively time. I was chiefly a spectator. Dr. and Mrs. Vaughan and Mr. & Mrs. Knowlton were out from A.A. The carriage did not come for us, as we had ordered so Mr. Batchelder (a very kind gentleman) brought Ida & me home in his cutter. The Strong girls called upon Ida in the P.M.

The Lost Village of Rawsonville

BY ROBERT ANSCHUETZ

Rawsonville is a name that still exists in areas just to the east of Ypsilanti, but is a place that is said to be nowhere to be actually found. For the most part that is true, but there are still some remnants around if you know where to look. The name Rawsonville certainly still exists. Interstate 94 expressway signs advise travelers to take exit 187 for Rawsonville Rd. just a few miles east of Ypsilanti. Rawsonville Rd. forms the division line between Washtenaw County (Ypsilanti Township) and Wayne County (Van Buren Township). There is a historical marker describing Rawsonville in front of the McDonald's on Rawsonville Rd. Hundreds of workers punch their time cards daily at Ford's Rawsonville Plant. Likewise, hundreds of children are dropped off daily at Rawsonville Elementary School on S. Grove St. near Snow Rd. at the eastern border of Ypsilanti Township and Washtenaw County. Henry Ford's Rawsonville Dam created Ford Lake near Ypsilanti, although the dam has since been renamed the Ford Lake Dam. Rawsonville still even shows up on Google Maps, listed as an "unincorporated community" roughly northwest of Rawsonville Elementary School, where residents and businesses would actually have an Ypsilanti mailing address.



Rawsonville Historical Marker installed in 1985 on Rawsonville Rd.

The historical marker on Rawsonville Rd. reads as follows:

Old Rawsonville Village

Rawsonville, now a ghost town, was once a thriving village. On September 13, 1823, the first land patent in Van Buren Township was given to Henry Snow for this site, which was soon known as Snow's Landing. Called Rawsonville by 1838, the community reached its peak around the time of the Civil War. It then boasted sawmills, grist mills, two cooper shops, a stove factory, several dry goods and general stores, a wagon maker and three saloons. Rawsonville's failure to attract railroad service led to its decline. By the 1880s many of its businesses and mills had closed and its residents were moving away. In 1925 a dam erected on the Huron River covered most of the remaining structures with the newly-formed Belleville Lake.

So, we know there was a place called Rawsonville, but we can't really pinpoint exactly where it is anymore. So where was it? Some people are adamant that Rawsonville now lies beneath the waters of Belleville Lake, a victim of the Edison Company's 1925 French Landing Dam that permanently flooded a portion the Huron River, and Rawsonville along with it. Some, therefore, equate Rawsonville to Michigan's own version of Atlantis. This article will dispel most of that myth as well as provide many more historical facts about the lost village of Rawsonville.

Amariah Rawson – the village of Rawsonville's namesake. *Photo courtesy "Water Under the Bridge."*

Betsy Carpenter Rawson – the wife of Amariah Rawson. *Photo courtesy "Water Under the Bridge."*

First, a little history. The area around Ypsilanti was settled by European descendants who mostly traveled up the Huron River starting from Lake Erie near the southern terminus of the Detroit River. Settlers came from the east by flatboats propelled by long poles to claim land and set out new lives for their families. The Huron River around Ypsilanti became tough to navigate due to its shallow depth and windy path.

The Rawsonville Inn shortly before it was torn down in the 1960s when it was a private residence. This inn dated back to the early days of Rawsonville from around 1830. *Photo courtesy the YHS collection.*

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Therefore, before Woodruff's Grove, Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, and Dexter were established, a tiny village, just east of Ypsilanti on the Huron River, would be settled first because it was fairly easy to navigate to that point. For a while, that village at the far eastern border of Washtenaw County would out-shine Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor as the prominent village in Washtenaw County. At the same time, the same village simultaneously was a prominent village in Wayne County. What? That doesn't make sense, does it?

This is a story about Rawsonville, the lost and mostly forgotten village that straddled both Washtenaw and Wayne counties. Many people think that the only reason why Rawsonville disappeared was the flooding of Belleville Lake in the early part of the 20th century, but that is only a small reason for the disappearance of Rawsonville. The formation of Belleville Lake in 1925 perhaps can be thought of as the final death knell of a village that was already disappearing from its late 1800s peak.

Rawsonville was originally known as Snow's Landing, named after the pioneers Henry and Sally Snow, originally from Maine, who purchased the first land grant in the area on September 13, 1823. That was the same year that Benjamin Woodruff arrived in the area and purchased his land grant a little further down the river at Woodruff's Grove, and two years before the village of Ypsilanti would be founded in 1825. It was also many years before neighboring Belleville was platted in 1847. Henry Snow built his home and a saw mill on the Huron River on the Washtenaw County side of the county line. Alas, the Snows didn't stay in the area for very long, and on July 21, 1825, Henry Snow sold his property to Abel Millington and Henry and Sally left the area.

In 1825, Amariah Rawson, his wife Betsy, and several children arrived at Snow's Landing in a covered wagon pulled by a team of oxen. This differed from the typical means of travel which would typically have been along the Huron River from Lake Erie. Rawson was born in 1787 and was a veteran of the War of 1812. He and his family were from Walworth, New York, not far from Rochester near the banks of Lake Ontario. The Rawson family stopped for a bit in Saline, but decided to take a turn back a little to the east and settle at Snow's Landing.

Amariah Rawson purchased 160 acres on the south bank of the Huron River. He built a second saw mill in Snow's Landing and set about clearing his land to support his lumber business. In support of his saw mill, he built the first dam to cross the river. In December of 1825, Rawson was appointed Justice of the Peace for Washtenaw County by acting Michigan Territory Governor William Woodbridge. In 1831 he was reappointed to this position by Governor Lewis Cass.

The village of Snow's Landing grew at a rapid pace. Around 1830, a Mr. Rothwell built a large inn on the north bank of the river. The inn served as a stopping point for travelers coming up the river, as well as stagecoaches that would stop along their journeys. The large main room of the inn was used as a tavern and contained a black walnut bar. Travelers from Monroe, Woodruff's Grove, Ypsilanti, and Ann Arbor stopped at the Rawsonville Inn for rest and supplies. For a time, Rawsonville was larger than both Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. Native Americans even traded furs there. There was a

grist mill on the north shore of the Huron River, and a saw mill and woolen mill to the south. A church was located north of the Rawsonville Inn.

As eluded to by the fur trading at the Rawsonville Inn, in the early days of Snow's Landing, Native Americans frequently interacted with the settlers. The Native Americans referred to the present-day Rawsonville Rd. as the "Great Trail." The Rawson children were known to hide under their bed covers whenever the Native Americans showed up at the door asking for food. The fear was short-lived, and the children later made friends with some of the Native American children. Most of the interactions between the two cultures were friendly, but there were also conflicts. A man named Captain Braley lived at Snow's Landing and took it upon himself to purge the area of Native Americans. He reportedly often went into the surrounding woods and killed several Native Americans over the years.

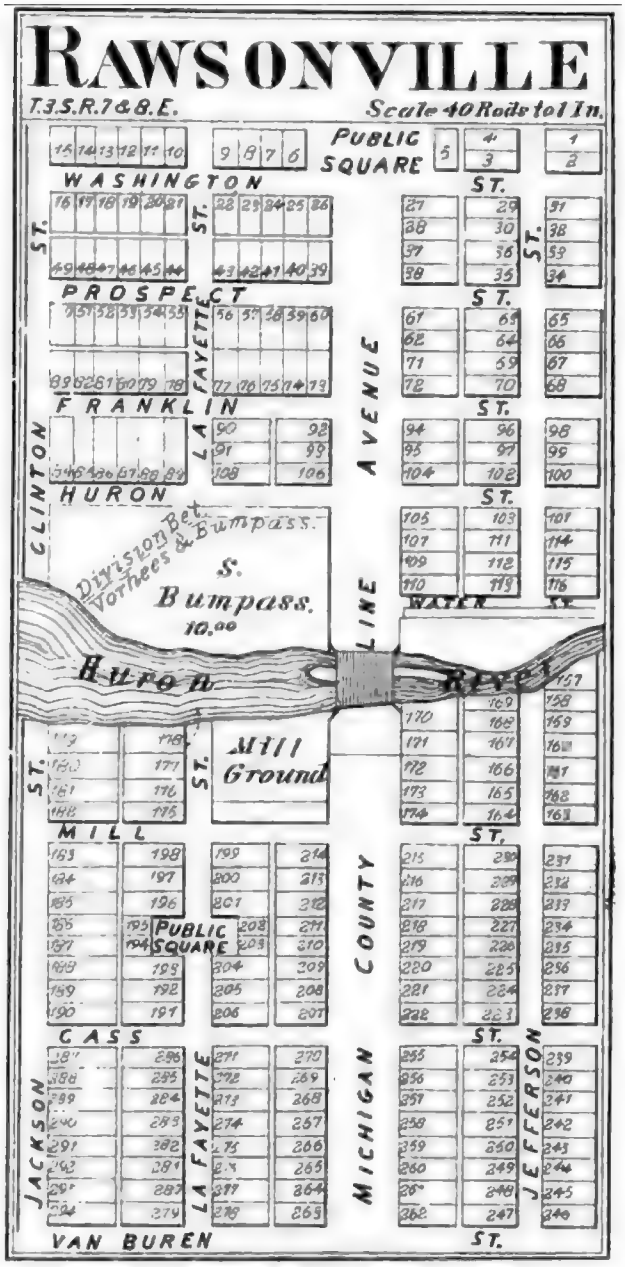
The transition from Snow's Landing to Rawsonville wasn't in a straight line as one might expect. With the growing settlement of Snow's Landing, in 1836 Amariah Rawson, Abraham Voorheis, and Matthew Woods filed a plat of the village and formally had its name changed from Snow's Landing to Michigan City. The plat that was filed was full of several parallel crossing roads, public squares, and the village was depicted in four quadrants. The Huron River ran through Michigan City from west to east and thus split the plat north and south. Michigan Ave., now Rawsonville Rd., ran north and south and thus split the plat east and west. The west side of Michigan City was in Washtenaw County and the east side was in Wayne County.

Amariah Rawson was seen as the village's leader and he was appointed the village's Postmaster. A few years after the establishment of Michigan City, the village citizens filed a petition with the Michigan State Legislation asking that the name of the village be changed from Michigan City to Rawsonville. On March 22, 1839, the Michigan Legislature passed the act that formally changed the name of the village to Rawsonville. In 1846, Amariah Rawson purchased the general store and operated the Rawsonville Post Office from the confines of the store.

Rawsonville reached its peak in the mid- to late-1800's. Business directories taken from Dr. Samuel Robbe's History of Van Buren Township, show the progression and regression of businesses throughout the years.

At the time of the Civil War, Rawsonville had several general stores, a sawmill, a grist mill, two cooper shops, a wagon maker, a cheese factory, a distillery, and three saloons.

In 1877, Rawsonville had two general stores, two cooper shops, two blacksmith shops, two flour mills, a woolen mill, a carriage and wagon manufacturer, a cheese manufacturer, a yarn manufacturer, a boot and shoe manufacturer, a hotel, and a post office.



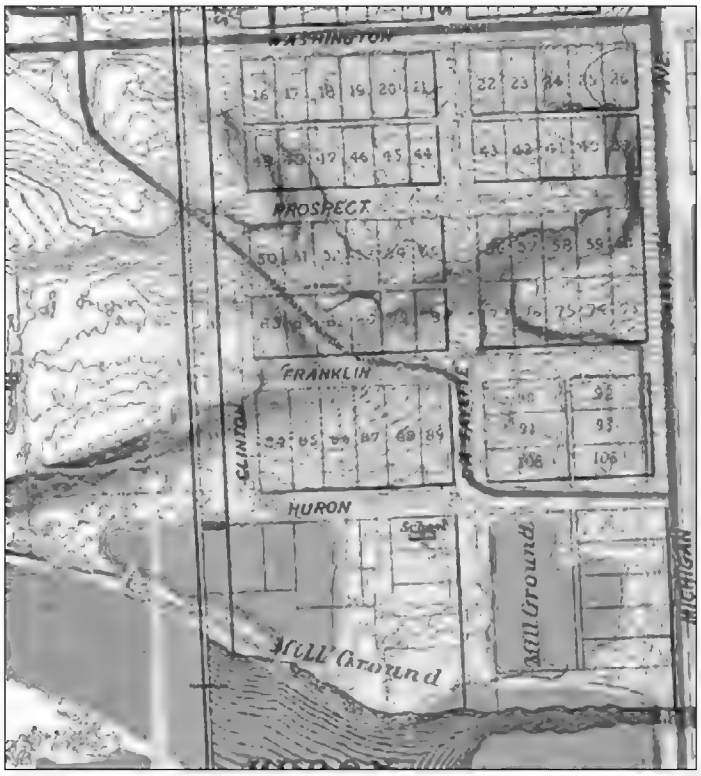
1876 Plat of Rawsonville village from the 1876 Belden Atlas of Wayne County. Note, the village never looked like this.

In 1897, Rawsonville had two general stores, a grist mill, a woolen mill, two music teachers, a blacksmith, a wagon maker, a pastor, a post office, a road cart agent, two masons, a kettle bail manufacturer, a horse shoer, a stock farm, and a fertilizer agent.

In 1901, Rawsonville had two general stores, two music teachers, a blacksmith, a pastor, a carpenter, three teachers, a meat dealer, a post office, a mason, a fruit grower, two constables, a fertilizer agent, and a justice of the peace.

In 1930, Rawsonville had no businesses of any kind.

Rawsonville was doomed by a rail system and roads that



The north half of the Washtenaw County portion of Rawsonville Village from an 1895 Plat overlaid onto modern topographical map. Much of this part of the village would have been too hilly to build houses or roads. This graphic also depicts Grove St., Rawsonville Rd., and Snow Rd.

displaced the need for river barges to get materials inland to Washtenaw County. The Monroe and Ypsilanti Railroad secured a charter in 1836 to run a rail line from Ypsilanti to Monroe on Lake Erie, with a planned stop in Rawsonville. Unfortunately, this railroad went bankrupt before any tracks were laid. The chances for success of Rawsonville took a turn for the worse when the Michigan Central Rail Road service ran tracks three miles to the north of Rawsonville and bypassed the village. Similarly, the Wabash Railroad ran its tracks about three miles to the south of Rawsonville, and built a station in Belleville. The Chicago Road from Detroit to Chicago would be built to the north of Rawsonville which also bypassed the village.

Alas, supply barges along the Huron River slowed their pace of deliveries, and many residents moved out. By the late 1890s many of the businesses and mills had closed. In 1900, the big mill and several other stores and buildings were damaged by rushing waters of the Huron River due to a significant rainfall that caused a breakdown of the Cornwell Dam in Ann Arbor. The dam collapse caused a wave of water to rush down the river all the way to Rawsonville, which damaged the buildings. The Daily Ypsilantian-Press of July 25, 1913, reported that not much was left of Rawsonville as of that date. Note that this was well before the 1925 flooding of the Huron River at the French Landing Dam east of Belleville that created Edison (later Belleville) Lake. By 1913, the article reports that a meager seven families were still living in Rawsonville, totaling less than 50 people.

The article from the 1913 newspaper, titled "Rawsonville – the Deserted Village" states:

So little is left of Rawsonville now that it is fairly hard to find. Some of the old buildings are standing, with boards shutting up windows and doors, the personification of decay and ruin. But for the greater part, when the village began to fail, every trace of it was taken away. The houses and buildings, all of wood, were torn down, and the lumber carted away to play a part in the erection of larger and newer edifices.

The final piece of the demise of Rawsonville occurred in 1925 when the French Landing Dam was constructed, flooding a large basin of the Huron River and creating Edison Lake, later renamed to Belleville Lake. This year, 2025, marks the 100-year birthday of Belleville Lake. The Rawsonville Michigan Historic Site marker, erected in 1985, states that the dam "covered most of the remaining structures with the newly-formed Belleville Lake." Later in this article, we will delve a little more into the (in)accuracy of that statement.

So, let's explore a little more about village of Rawsonville – both at its peak and through its demise. The village of Rawsonville was fairly unique in that it lies within two counties – Wayne and Washtenaw, divided by present-day Rawsonville Road. The location of the village presented some issues when it was formed, and some vestiges of those issues continue to this day. Was Rawsonville in Wayne County or Washtenaw County? Well, it was definitely in Washtenaw County as evidenced by the fact that Amariah Rawson was appointed Justice of the Peace of Washtenaw County. It was also in Wayne County since the first land grant to Henry Snow was for land in Van Buren Township in Wayne County. Maps of Rawsonville appear in both Wayne County and Washtenaw County atlases. Even today, Rawsonville Elementary School is located in Ypsilanti Township in Washtenaw County at the intersection of Grove Road and Snow Road. But to complicate matters, Rawsonville Elementary School is part of the Van Buren Township School District that belongs to Wayne County. Yes, the Snow Road that abuts Rawsonville Elementary School is named after the original founder of the village, Henry Snow.

An interesting story about one of the advantages of a village straddling the borders of two counties was published in an October 30, 1954 article in the Ypsilanti Daily Press which was republished in the book Water Under the Bridge by Cathy S. Horte and Diane F. Wilson. The Rawsonville Inn was located on the Washtenaw County side of Rawsonville Rd. which "made it popular for cock fight devotees who could watch the sport from its porches. When word was received that the Washtenaw Sheriff was on his way, the pit was moved to the Wayne County side of the road. If

The village of Rawsonville around 1895. Looking north from the south side of the Huron River and west of Rawsonville Rd. On the south side of the river you can see from left to right the Grist Mill, Saw Mill, Woolen Mill, and Drying House. Across the Huron River, between the mills, you can see the Rawsonville Inn. To the left of the Grist Mill you can see the spire of the old Rawsonville Church. *Photo courtesy of Pam Gibb and WhatShallWeWeird.com.*

the Wayne Sheriff was coming, the birds were pitted on the Washtenaw side."

Let's take a peek at Rawsonville around its heydays. Looking at the old plat of Rawsonville from the 1876 Belden Atlas of Wayne County, it shows that there was a public square on each side of the river, with several roads laid out parallel to each other going both north and south and east and west. The north-south roads included Jackson St., Clinton St., LaFayette St., Michigan Ave., and Jefferson St. The east-west roads included Washington St., Prospect St., Franklin St., Huron St., Water St., Mill St., Cass St., and Van Buren St. Amongst the roads were subdivided lots laid out for businesses and houses. In 1875, the Rawsonville School Board dedicated $1,000 to build a brick schoolhouse at the site of the old wooden school that had occupied more than 100 students. The school served up to 125 students at its peak.

There is an excellent series of blogs about the early village of Rawsonville on the website WhatShallWeWeird.com. In one of the blogs titled, "Old Rawsonville: Setting the Record Straight" (https://tinyurl.com/3yhfas5b), the author takes a close look at several early plats of Rawsonville, and further takes a look at the underlying topology and overlays the plats on top of modern maps. The blog mentions that it is highly probable that these lots in the early plats weren't all occupied, and several of the roads within the plats may never have been built.

One reason why we know that the plat didn't reflect the actual village of Rawsonville is that the hilly terrain would not have allowed either roads or houses. In fact, several roads traversing the original plat of Rawsonville would have had to have been severely graded in order to accommodate buggy or vehicle traffic, and there is no evidence that that took place. Another reason why the gridded road system probably never existed was due to the marshy condition of the soil along this portion of the Huron River. Many of the early plats included only the portion of Rawsonville to the north of the Huron River, and besides a saw mill and woolen mill on the south shore of the Huron River, it is unlikely that many buildings or homes occupied the village to the south of the river.

Essentially, the early plats of the village of Rawsonville can be interpreted as a "wish list" of what could be built, not a map of what was actually built. An early sketch of Rawsonville, drawn by Rawsonville resident Ben Own in 1895, shows that there were relatively few clusters of businesses and homes, mostly to the west of Rawsonville Rd. and north of the Huron River. The rest of the village was fairly scattered about and not built on a grid as larger villages would have been.

Today, only a few roads exist from the original plat of Rawsonville. The north-south road that divided the city, once called Michigan Ave., is now Rawsonville Rd. One of the east-west roads, formerly called Washington St., is now the eastern extent of Grove Rd. as it dead-ends at Rawsonville Rd. The road running northwest to southeast from Grove St. to Rawsonville Rd., called Snow Rd., curves through a few of the older streets in Rawsonville, including Franklin St., LaFayette St., and Huron St. South of the river, Mill Lane roughly corresponds to the old Mill St. on the early plats.

Many people think that a network of roads and the foundations of buildings still lie below Belleville Lake and were once part of the lost village of Rawsonville. Similar to the Lost Continent of Atlantis, this is mostly a myth. Credit again goes to the WhatShallWeWeird.com blog "Old Rawsonville – Setting the Record Straight" for exploring the extent of how the flooding of the river to form Belleville Lake would have affected the village of Rawsonville. First off, the western half of Rawsonville that lies within Washtenaw County was totally unaffected by the creation of Belleville Lake. Secondly, the eastern half of Rawsonville village in Wayne County only extended approximately two blocks east of Rawsonville Rd.

Overlaying the current Belleville Lake onto the eastern half of the plat of Rawsonville, it shows that there is enough land between the road and the lake to accommodate these

two city streets. The plat of the early village of Rawsonville would have extended to the east to approximately to the back of the modern-day Taco Bell, Wendy's, and McDonald's drive-thru. So, even buildings and houses that had existed at the eastern portion of Rawsonville would likely still be above water. According to the book Water Under the Bridge, a dyke was built to protect some of the buildings from the rising water of Belleville Lake.

So, if the buildings and roads of Rawsonville aren't flooded beneath Belleville Lake, what likely happened to them? As covered earlier in this article, many of the buildings in Rawsonville were already torn down by 1913 as citizens abandoned the village. Between the time of the article written in the Daily Ypsilantian-Press in 1913 and the formation of Belleville Lake in 1925, additional buildings were torn down. A few buildings and homes are documented to have remained in the village of Rawsonville after the formation of Belleville Lake. The former Rawsonville Inn that was built to serve the pioneer settlers in the area in the 1830s survived until the 1960s.

The point is that by the time Belleville Lake was created in 1925, very few buildings from the village of Rawsonville still stood, and after Belleville Lake was created, those few remaining buildings were still standing. Any structures that had been built in the main village plat wouldn't have been touched by Belleville Lake. Any stray buildings or homes to the east of the main village plat would have been potentially submerged below the flooded lake, but those buildings aren't well documented and most if not all of these structures would have been demolished when the village was largely abandoned before the time Belleville Lake was flooded. The road leading from Rawsonville Rd. to the Soop Cemetery was partially submerged. The Soop Cemetery served the Rawsonville community and is located just east of Van Buren Park on Old Denton Rd. It is true, however, that the creation of Belleville Lake in 1925 was likely the final nail in the coffin for the demise of the village of Rawsonville.

In an April, 1930 newspaper article in The Ypsilanti Daily Press, there is an article about the history of Rawsonville and how it declined over the years. In the article, it states that there were only nine remaining residents of Rawsonville in 1930, and the average age of six of them was 78-years old. Two additional part-time residents spent only their weekends in Rawsonville. At the time the article was written, the oldest resident was Henry Leonard who was 81 years old and born in 1848. The 1930 article states that the little Methodist church no longer holds regular services, and the adjacent church barn had been torn down the pre-

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vious year. The small group of citizens of 1930 Rawsonville were an optimistic bunch. The article concludes with the following sentence: "Meanwhile, this little group of pioneers persistently looks on the bright side of life in their declining years, hoping for return of the days when Rawsonville existed in all its glory."

The Rawsonville Cheese Company and employees. *Photo courtesy the YHS collection.*

As could be expected, some of the business owners in Rawsonville left their foundering city to make their businesses in Ypsilanti. Eurotas Morton served in Michigan's House of Representatives in 1841 while residing in Rawsonville. He was a merchant who built and operated a store in Rawsonville and was Van Buren Township's Justice of the Peace and Postmaster for many years. After the decline of Rawsonville, he moved to Ypsilanti and became one of Ypsilanti's most prominent citizens and capitalists in the second half of the 1800s. It is said that he was one of the founders of Ypsilanti's First National Bank and is buried at Highland Cemetery. William Clarke operated the flour mill at Rawsonville starting in 1840 and turned the mill's finances around. Ypsilanti's Clarke Brothers furniture firm was owned by his two sons as they left Rawsonville for Ypsilanti. Perhaps one of Ypsilanti's most famous residents, Daniel Quirk, also had ties to Rawsonville. At one time, the Quirk family operated extensive farms and several homes in Van Buren Township and Belleville. In about 1854, Quirk sold all his business interests in Belleville though he retained ownership of the Quirk Farms which were located near Rawsonville and Belleville.

After the decline of the village began, Rawsonville was resilient, and hung around for a few more decades, and in fact, it still sort of exists to this day, albeit in a transformed state. After Belleville Lake was created, there were some thoughts that Rawsonville would become attractive to homebuilders as a lakefront community. In 1933, Harry Mosely hired two men who were out of work from the Depression to build two rustic log cabins on his property fronting the lake. He rented these cabins out to summer vacationers from June to September.

Around 1930, Henry Ford took an interest in the old Rawsonville Inn and restored its second-floor dance hall to its original condition on the 100th anniversary of the building. He opened the dance hall to students of the Willow Run School and when it was dedicated, Ford's old-time dancing instructor, John Lovett, came to teach the children square dances. In 1936, the old bridge over the Huron River that connected the north and south portions of Rawsonville collapsed and

The old Rawsonville church is seen on the west side of the old dirt Rawsonville Rd. Date unknown, but probably around 1900-1920. Photo courtesy the Detroit Public Library.

was replaced by a steel bridge on Rawsonville Rd. In 1983, the steel bridge was removed and a modern concrete bridge was built over the river. In the 1940s, some families working at the Willow Run bomber plant moved to some of the remaining homes in Rawsonville, which breathed some life into the village. The old Rawsonville Inn and the church remained in their locations on Rawsonville Rd. on the north side of the Huron River until the 1960s. Alas, the Rawsonville Inn and church didn't get flooded below the lake, but they were demolished to make room for the widening of Rawsonville Rd. and they were in a state of disrepair.

The remnants of an old building near the old church as Rawsonville was in its demise, probably around 1900-1920. *Photo courtesy the Detroit Public Library.*

On October 27, 1983, the historic community of Rawsonville was dedicated as a Michigan State Historic Site. In 1985, a historic marker was placed at the intersection of Rawsonville and Grove, directly in front of the McDonald's. After the old Rawsonville Inn and church were demolished around 1962, there are very few structures remaining of the old village of Rawsonville. A house from the late 1880s still stands in the Wayne County portion of Rawsonville at 2441 Rawsonville Road. This house was the home of Caleb and Margaret Barlow. Caleb Barlow operated a general store and ran a grist mill in town. He was also Justice of the Peace and Postmaster. The Barlows also owned the Rawsonville Inn for a period of time.

A house still standing at 2315 Rawsonville Rd was built around 1890 for Jerome Rawson, son of the city's namesake Amariah Rawson. The house at 2347 Rawsonville Rd was built around 1900 and still stands. A portion of this house formerly served as the Phoenix Lodge Good Templer's Hall, and was formerly occupied by James and Gwyned Dixon, who were related by marriage to the Rawson family. The Phoenix Lodge Good Templar's Hall was dedicated on September 28, 1872 as a meeting place of an organization which campaigned against the evils of alcohol. The hall was later purchased by the Ladies Helping Hand Society. This group of women socialized, sewed quilts, and held lawn parties. Many community dinners were served by these organizations. Another house at 3357 Snow Rd was built in 1900 and remains as a reminder of the long-ago village of Rawsonville.

The 1875 Rawsonville brick school house on Snow Rd. with students circa 1930-1940. *Photo reprinted from a 1954 article in the Ypsilanti Daily Press.*

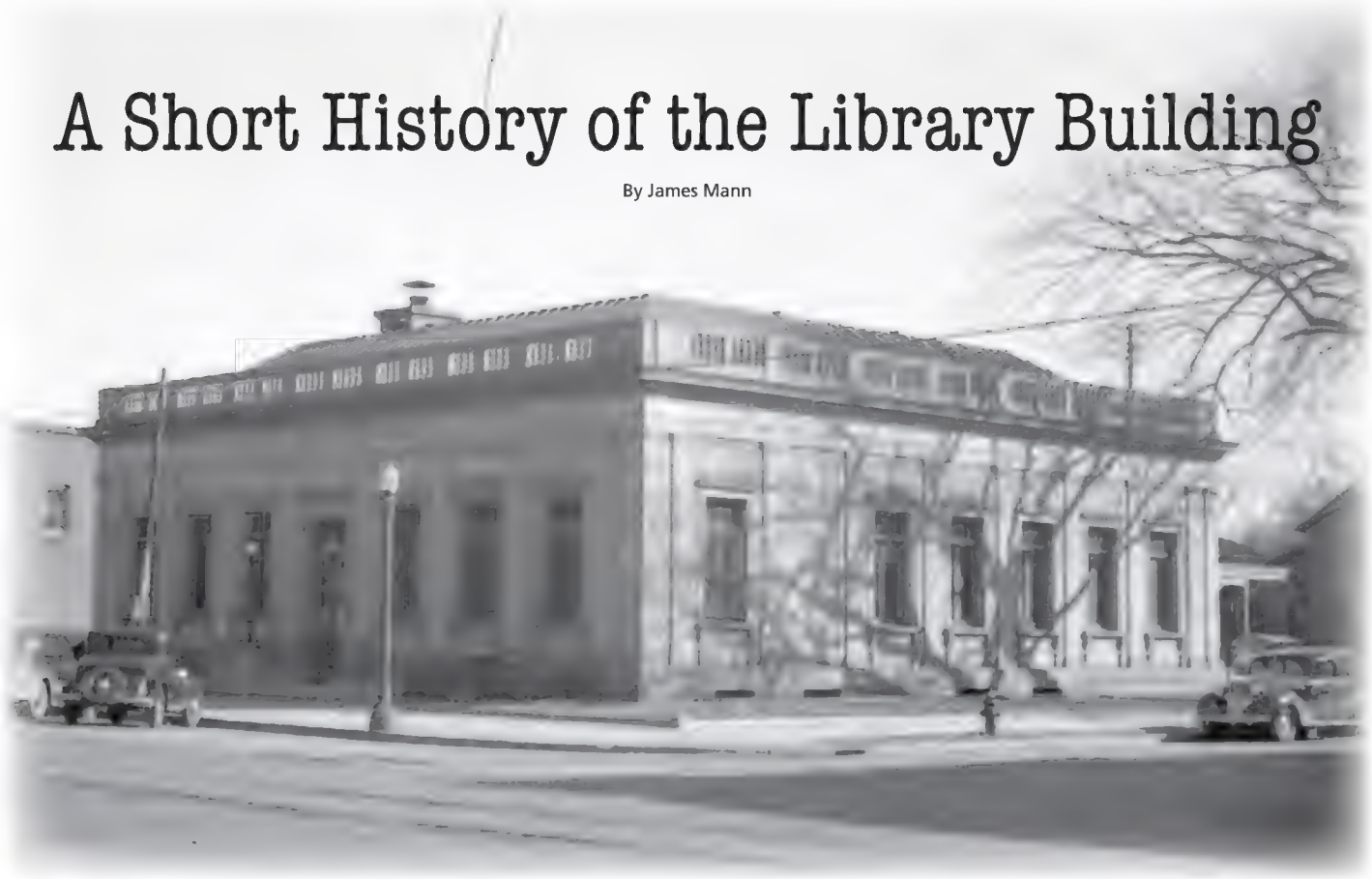
Rawsonville Rd. is now known for housing every imaginable fast-food chain and a few gas stations. The Lakewood Shopping Center, which had once been a bustling shopping destination anchored by a K-Mart, Big Lots, and Dunham Sporting Goods, now stands nearly vacant. In a way, the Lakewood Shopping Center mirrored the rise and decline of Rawsonville itself – a rapid rise to prominence followed by a rapid decline into decay.

So that's about it for the lost village of Rawsonville, which mostly exists today as an exit off of I-94, the name of a Van Buren Township elementary school in Ypsilanti Township, the name of a road full of fast-food chains, a few scattered homes from the early days of the village, and fading memories of a once-thriving village. I hope with this article you can see right past the numerous businesses on Rawsonville Rd. and imagine a bit of Rawsonville village's former charm and stature.

Robert Anschuetz grew up in Ypsilanti in the historic Swaine house at the corner of Forest Ave. and River St. Much of the research for this article comes from the book titled "Water Under the Bridge" by Horste and Wilson, a series of blogs about Rawsonville located at WhatShallWeWeird.com, information provided by Rawsonville native Pam Gibb, and some old articles from the Ypsilanti Press. Robert is a regular contributor to the Gleanings.

A Short History of the Library Building

By James Mann



Undated photograph of the United States Post Office in Ypsilanti on Michigan Avenue.

The Michigan Avenue branch of the Ypsilanti District Library has reopened after a severe storm in July of 2023 caused the building to suffer sustained water damage. In less than half an hour, the storm dropped more than an inch of rain, overwhelming the roof drains. Staff at the library saved the collection of books, with only about 100 books being lost to water damage. The water pouring in from the roof caused major damage to the interior of the building. The interior had to be dried, and mold had to be removed. Then work could begin to repair and restore the building. After delays and overcoming many other unforeseen problems, the imposing structure is once again open to the public.

So how did Ypsilanti come to have such an impressive structure for the public library?

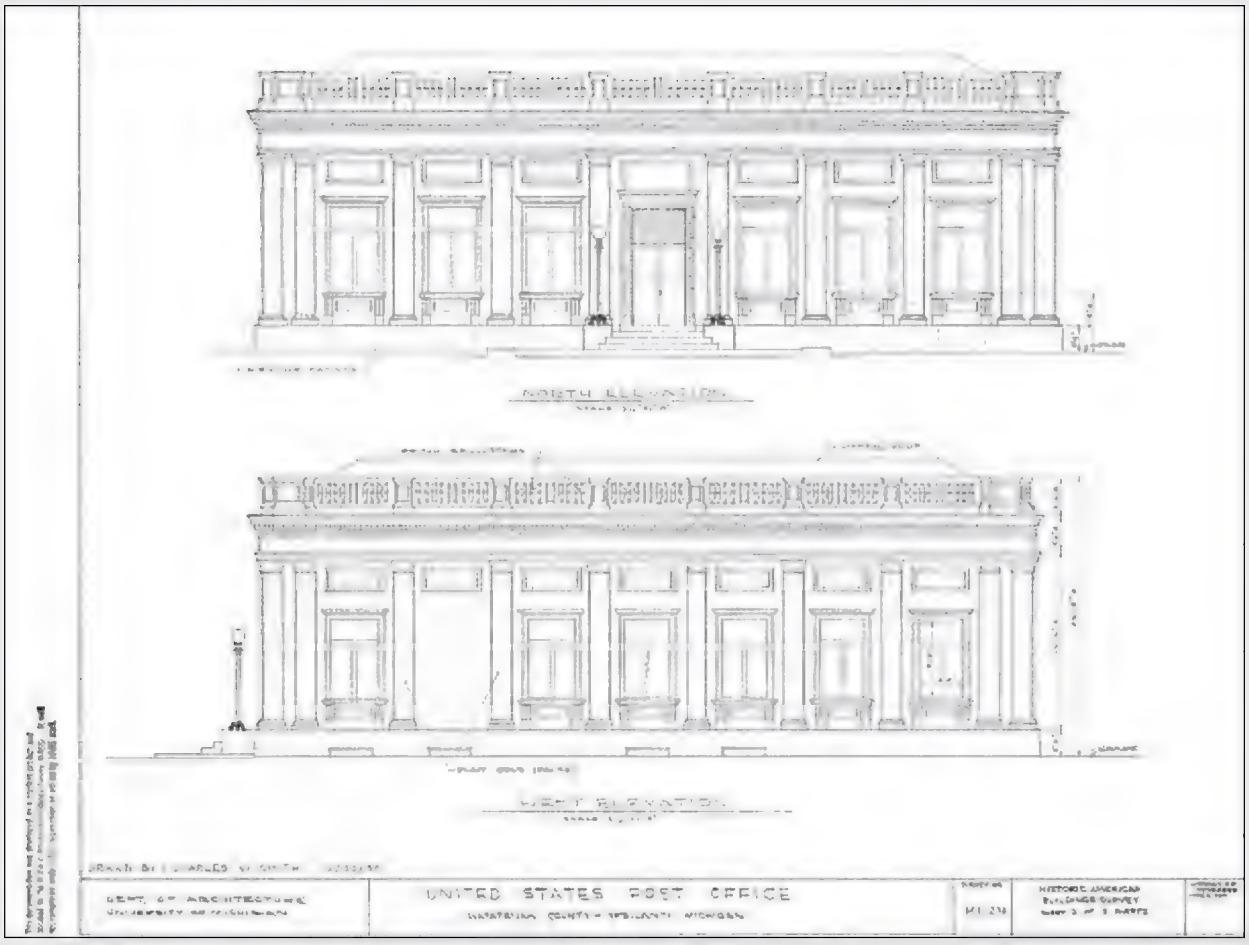
It came about from the United States Department of the Treasury.

The building was constructed as a post office.

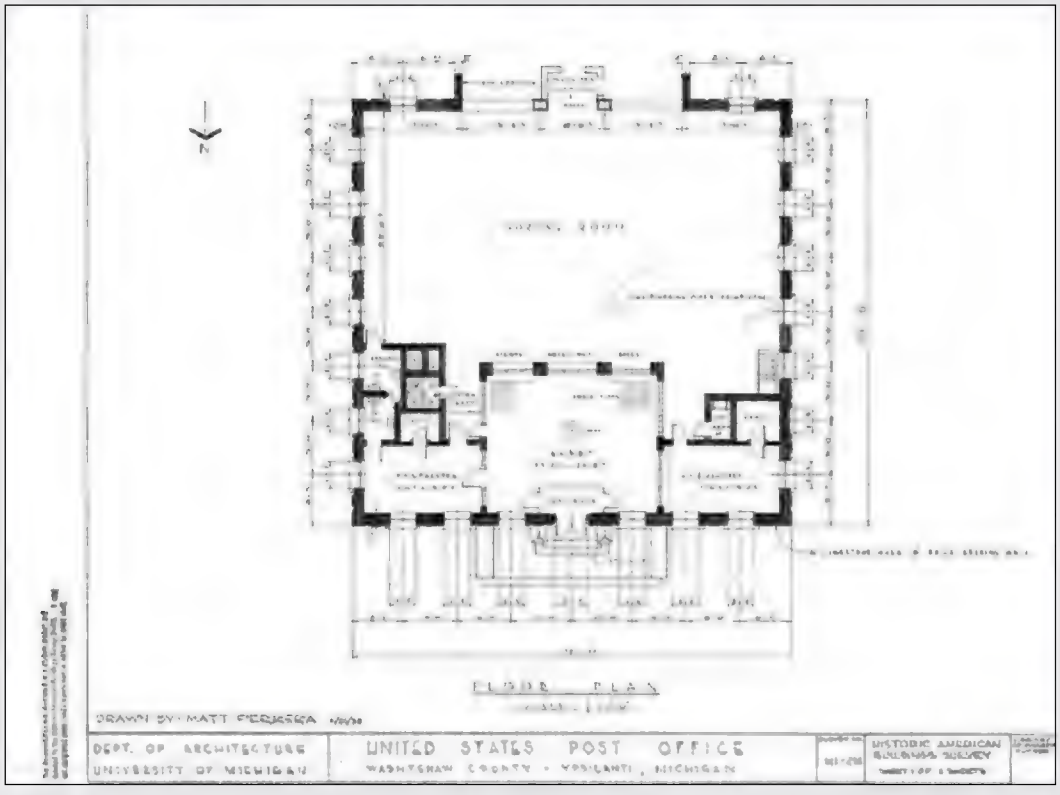
The first post office in Ypsilanti, back when it was the original community of Woodruff's Grove in the early 1820's, was in Benjamin Woodruff's hat. As the original community was small, he would deliver the mail when he came across the person while going about his business. At this time, the 1820's, the person receiving the mail had to pay for the delivery. In later years storekeepers were named as the city postmaster, and the office was in their place of business. There was no home delivery, so everyone had to stop by the shop to pick up their mail.

A post office building was established by the 1880's on the corner of North Huron and Pearl Street. "Frances Stewart, who had the honor of being the first and thus far, the only woman postmaster of Ypsilanti, received her commission on July 9, 1883," wrote Harvey Colburn in The Story of Ypsilanti. "Miss Stewart had served most efficiently as deputy during the terms of Greene and Spencer, and the office, which had hitherto been regarded as among the spoils of politics, by common consent rightfully belonged to her. A monster petition containing more than twelve hundred signatures was presented by a committee of twelve men to Senator Plamer of Detroit, and, in the face of unmistakable public sentiment, the politicians for a time were compelled to surrender. Miss Stewart finished the unexpired term and was reappointed for five years. At the close of that time the politicians regained their courage and sent a delegation to Miss Stewart to inform her that, although they were more than satisfied with her services, they could afford to give such an office to a woman who could not help in a political way. Miss Stewart then surrendered the place, and took a position in the Normal College office, which she held until her death." She stepped down from her post in 1888.

Free delivery of mail in the city was established in 1888, with four regular carriers and one substitute. Rural free delivery of the mail began in 1899.



Floor plan of the post office from the Historic American Buildings Survey (Library of Congress).



Drawing of the United States Post Office at Ypsilanti from the Historic American Buildings Survey (Library of Congress).)

Ypsilanti Public Library in an undated photograph from the 1960's.

By the early years of the 20th century, the office could no longer fulfill the needs of the community, so a new larger post office was needed in the city.

The Normal College News of October 1, 1915, carried the news that Ypsilanti would soon have a new post office. "The site for the new building is already the property of the government, which purchased it some time ago. The large vacant lot at the corner of Adams and West Michigan avenues has been chosen."

"Specifications," the account continued, "for the edifice state that it is to be constructed of light limestone, with granite where the latter is required. The cost is to approximate $50,000 with $19,330 to be exact, $48,675 of which is to be used in the actual construction, and the remainder in furniture and interior furnishings." The corner stone for the building was laid in 1915. Work on the building was completed in 1917. "The stone construction," noted Colburn, "and marble finishings in the lobby mark it as one of the last post office buildings of that type, erected by the United States Government, newer buildings being of cheaper material."

"This is a fine example of the 'Classic Commercial' type post office which was built between 1900 and 1920," noted a building survey, dated 1958. "Though many were built in our small cities during this period, they are now being replaced and are fast disappearing. In 1936, Spence Brothers of Saginaw added to the sorting room and built a larger loading dock. Original construction was of 24" brick foundation wall, and 18" brick bearing wall with 6" limestone facing, trussed roof with suspended ceiling, and reinforced concrete floor system; 1936 addition: unexcavated under addition, 12" buff-colored brick bearing walls."

Ladies Library building on North Huron. This was the public library from the 1890's until the library moved into the current location in 1962.

The survey further noted there were many gas lighting fixtures still in the building, and there were hidden catwalks installed so employees could be secretly observed. Mail was carried to Ypsilanti by train, delivered to the post office, sorted, and distributed throughout the city by the carriers.

The lobby at the front entrance allowed visitors to buy stamps, send mail, and use other U.S. Postal Service services. Behind it was the sorting area, where mail was organized for carriers before their routes. In the lobby there were three teller windows, and at each was a .45-caliber pistol, in case of robbery. There is no record of anyone attempting a holdup at the post office, but once a year an employee had to clean the guns and take them out to the country to test fire the guns to be sure they would work.

When the building opened it was state of the art, but over time, as the population of Ypsilanti grew the need for a larger facility became apparent. In 1962 the post office was moved to its current location, one block away on Adams Street. Soon after, the Ypsilanti Public Library moved from its previous location at the Ladies Library Building on North Huron Street, and into the old post office building.

Once again, the Michigan Avenue Branch of the Ypsilanti District Library is open and is as good as new.

(James Mann is a local historian, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

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You're invited to the Annual Business Meeting
of the **Ypsilanti Historical Society**

An Ypsilanti Story—
The Chevrolet Corvair
presented by **Eva McGuire**

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- **Election of Board of Trustees Nancy Balogh & Barry LaRue**

Sunday, October 26th, 2025
at **2 p.m. est.** held at the

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refreshments will be served

We will be offering the meeting on Zoom.
If you're interested in the Zoom option please send your
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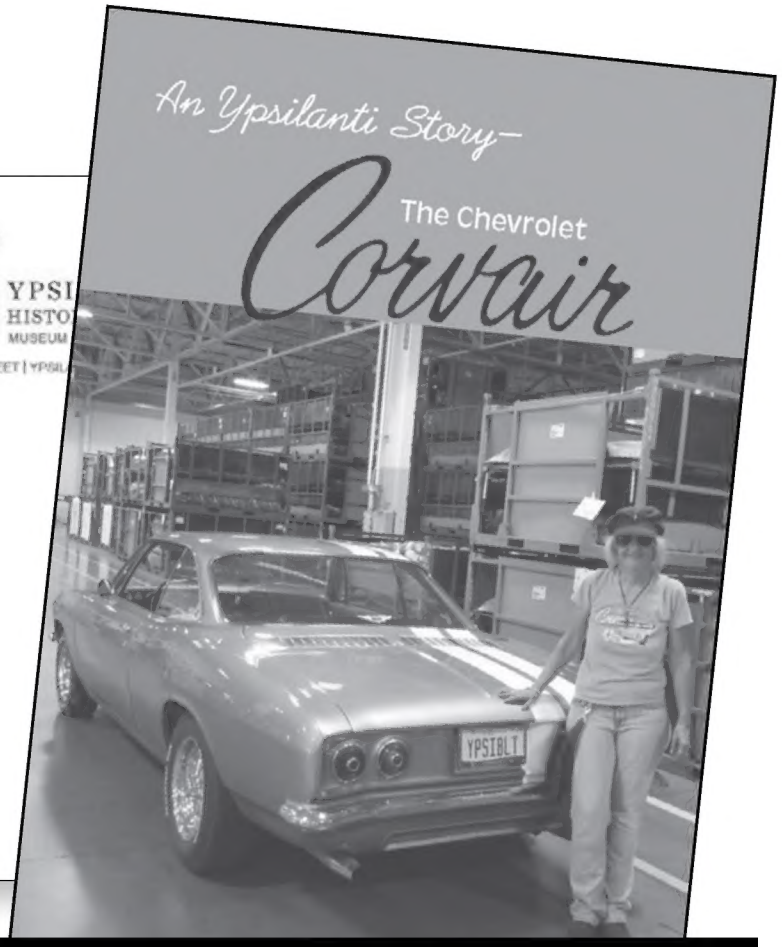

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